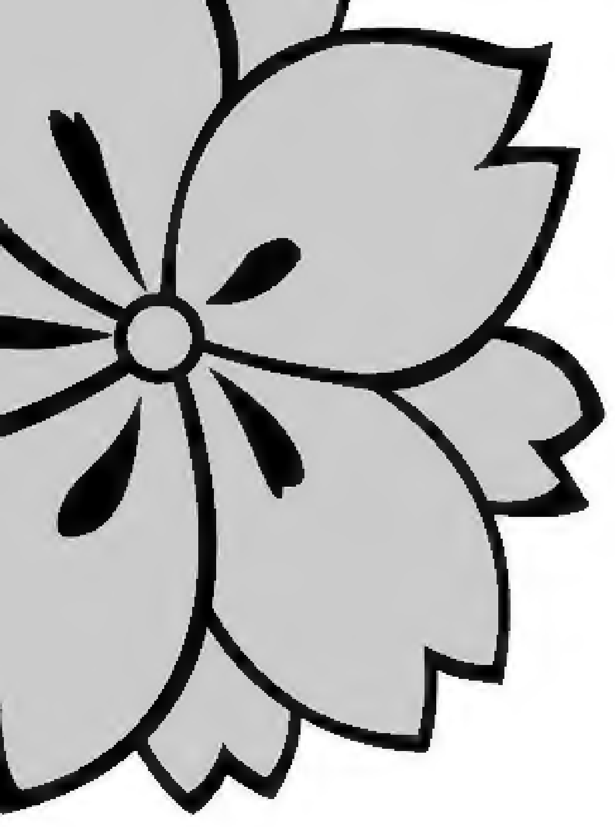
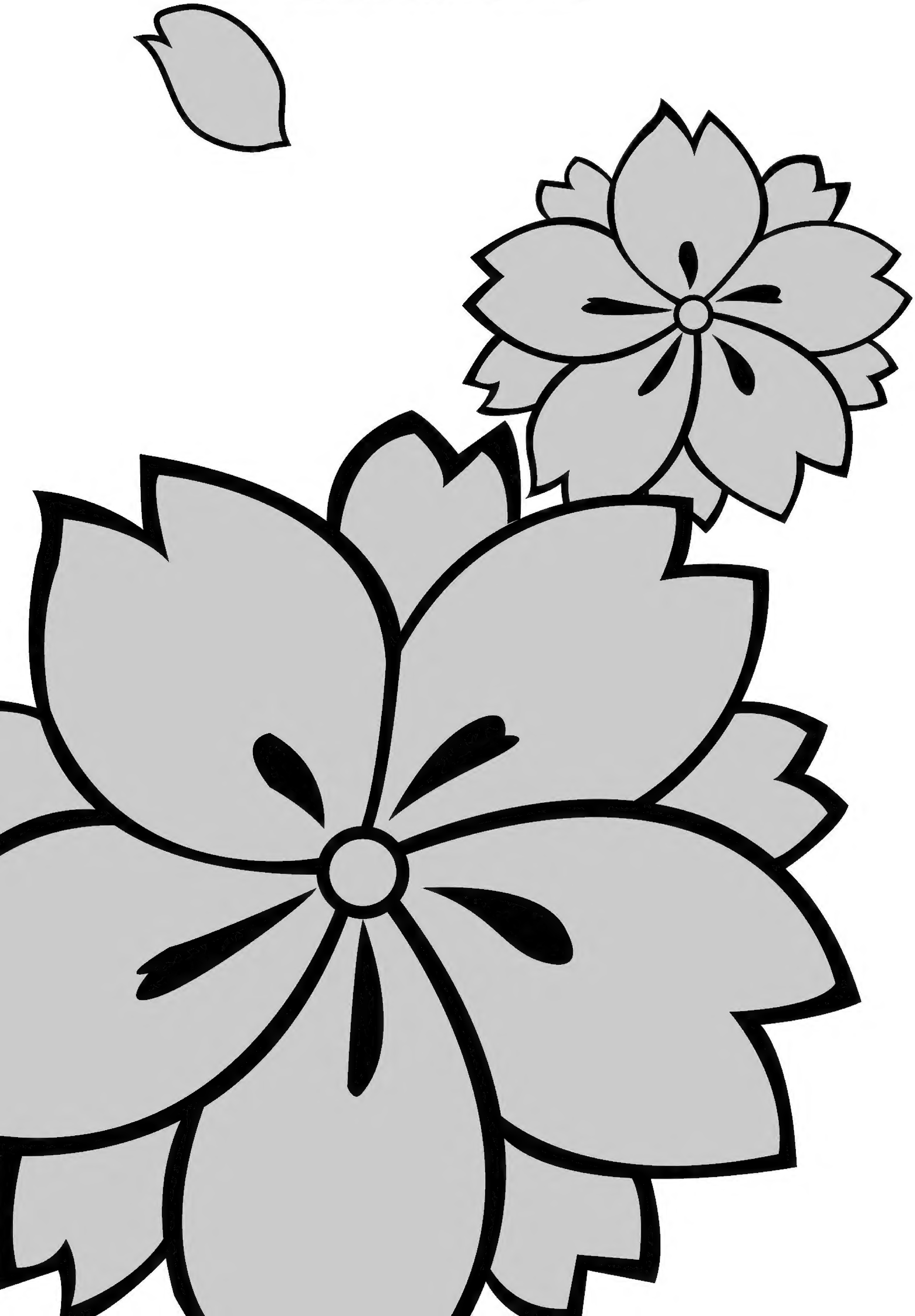
12

Yozakura Quartet

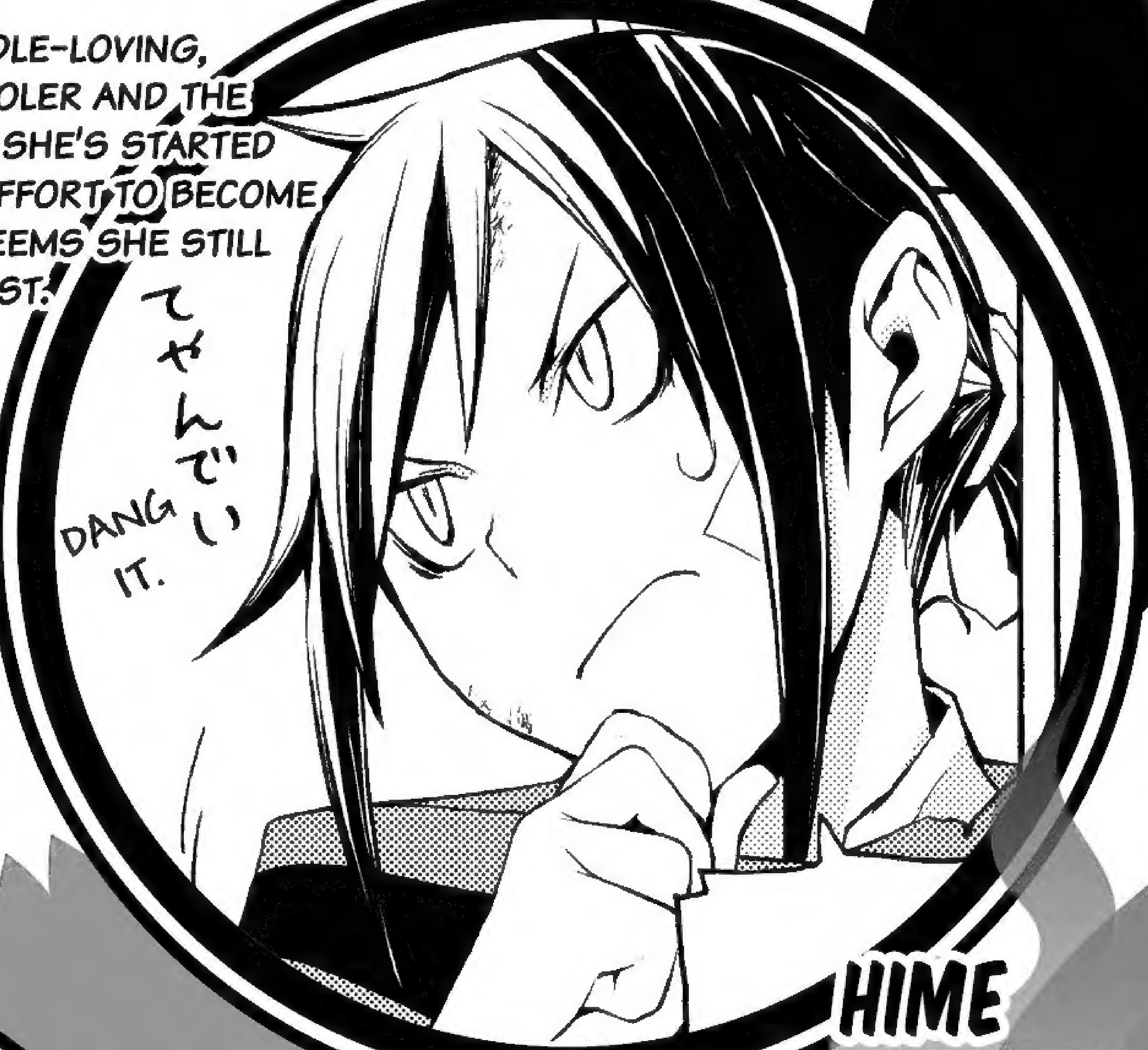
Suzuhito Yasuda



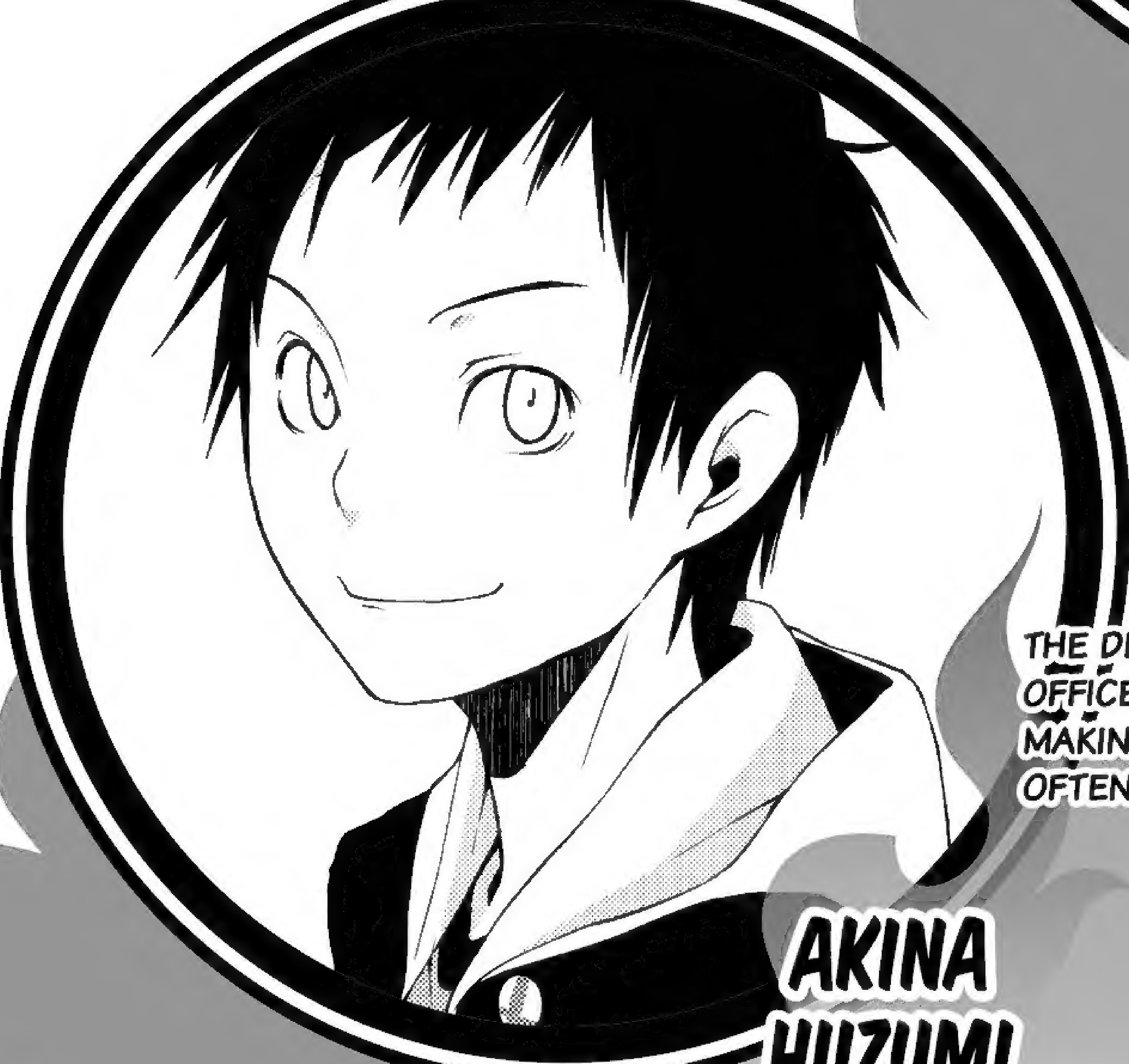
YOZAKURA QUARTET 12



A RAMBUNCTIOUS, MOODY, NOODLE-LOVING, SCARF-CLAD DEMON HIGH SCHOOLER AND THE MAYOR OF SAKURASHIN. LATELY, SHE'S STARTED LEARNING HOW TO COOK IN AN EFFORT TO BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT. EVEN SO, IT SEEMS SHE STILL LOVES AKINA'S COOKING THE MOST.


てやんでい
DANG IT.

HIME YARIZAKURA



THE DIRECTOR OF THE HIIZUMI LIFE COUNSELING OFFICE. AS ABOUT 20% OF HIS WORKDAY GOES INTO MAKING FOOD FOR HIME AND HIS EMPLOYEES, HE'S OFTEN IN THE OFFICE VERY LATE.

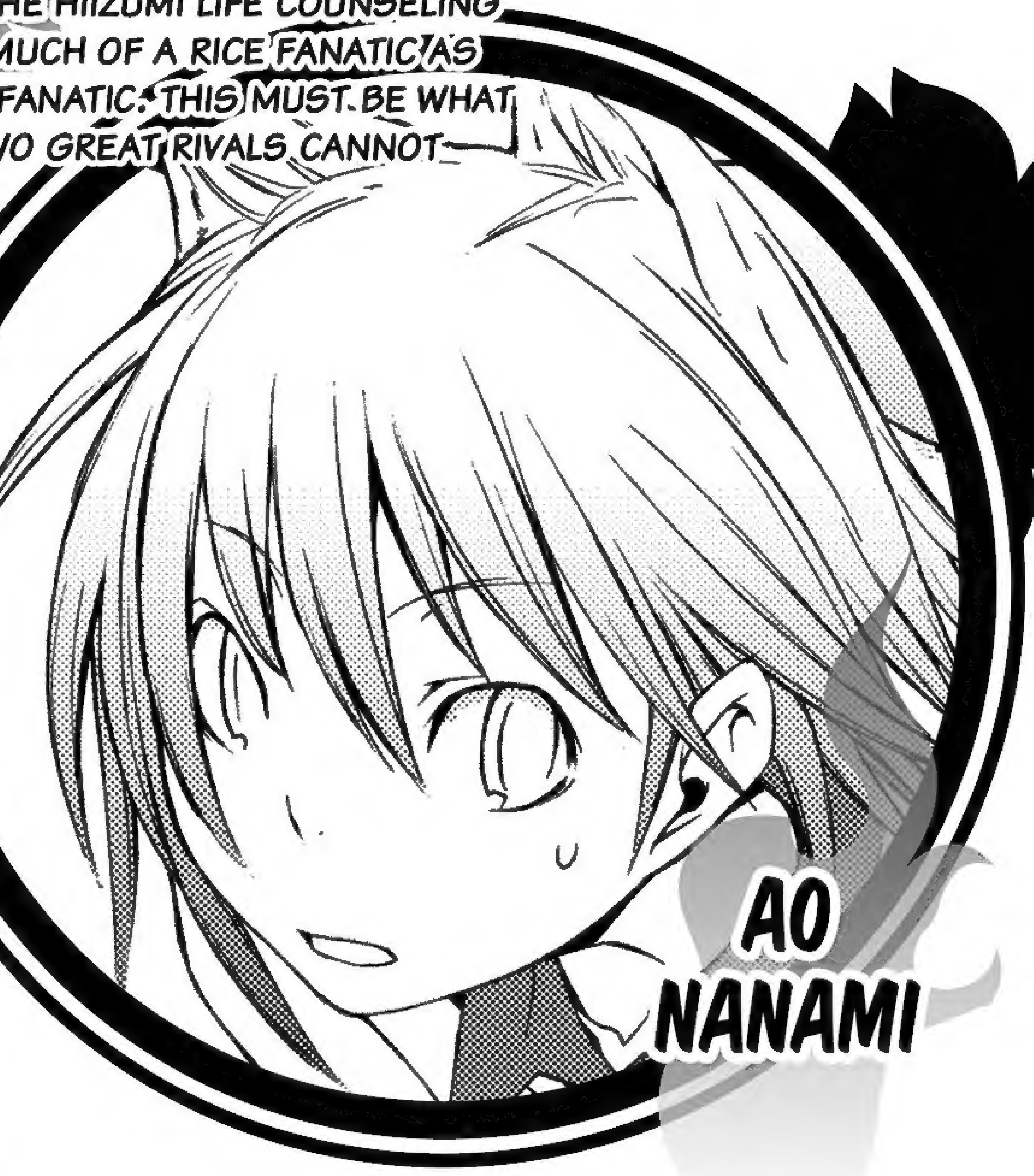
AKINA HIIZUMI

Quartet of cherry blossoms in the night

YOZAKURA QUARTET

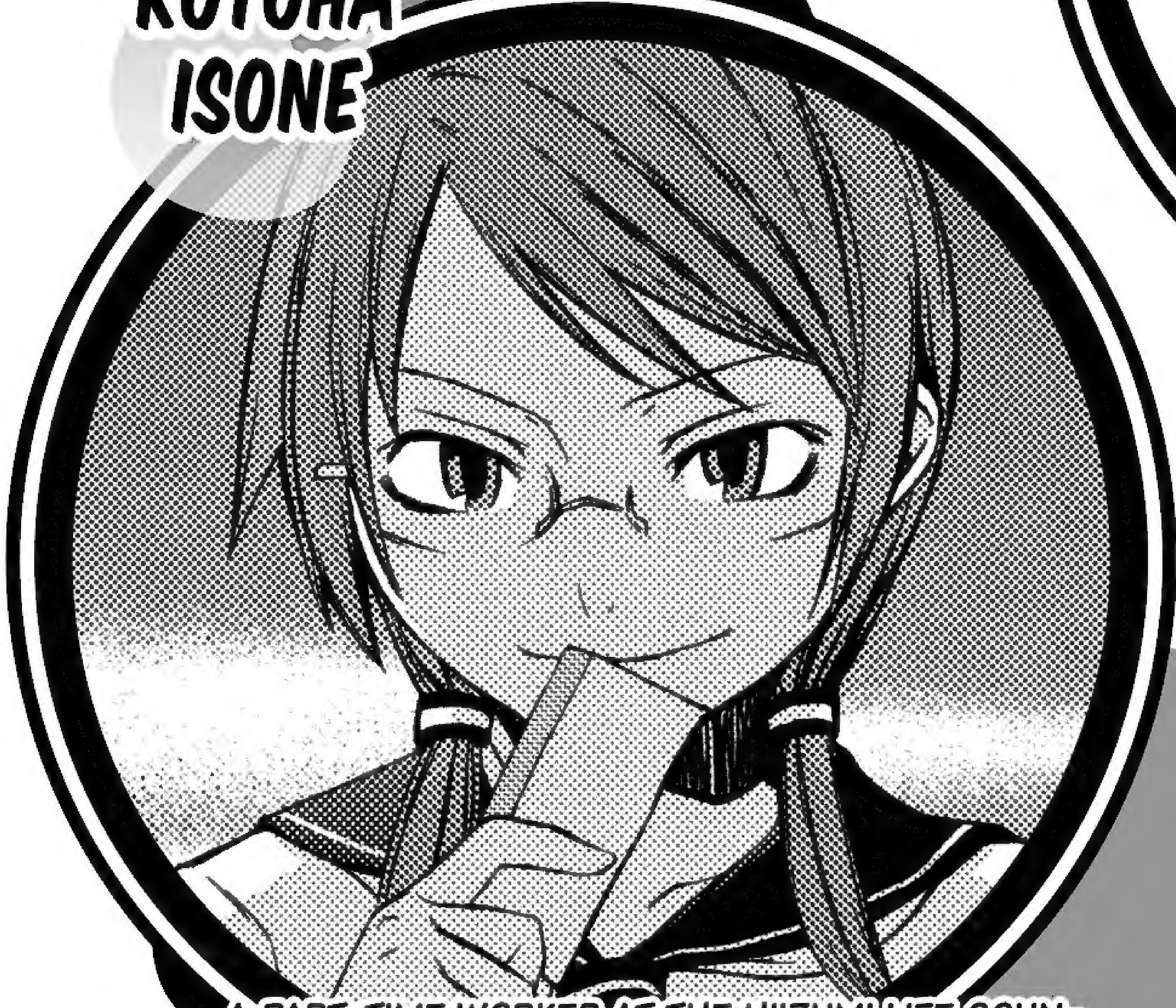
CHARACTER PROFILE

AN EMPLOYEE OF THE HIIZUMI LIFE COUNSELING OFFICE. SHE'S AS MUCH OF A RICE FANATIC AS HIME IS A NOODLE FANATIC. THIS MUST BE WHAT THEY MEAN BY "TWO GREAT RIVALS CANNOT COEXIST."

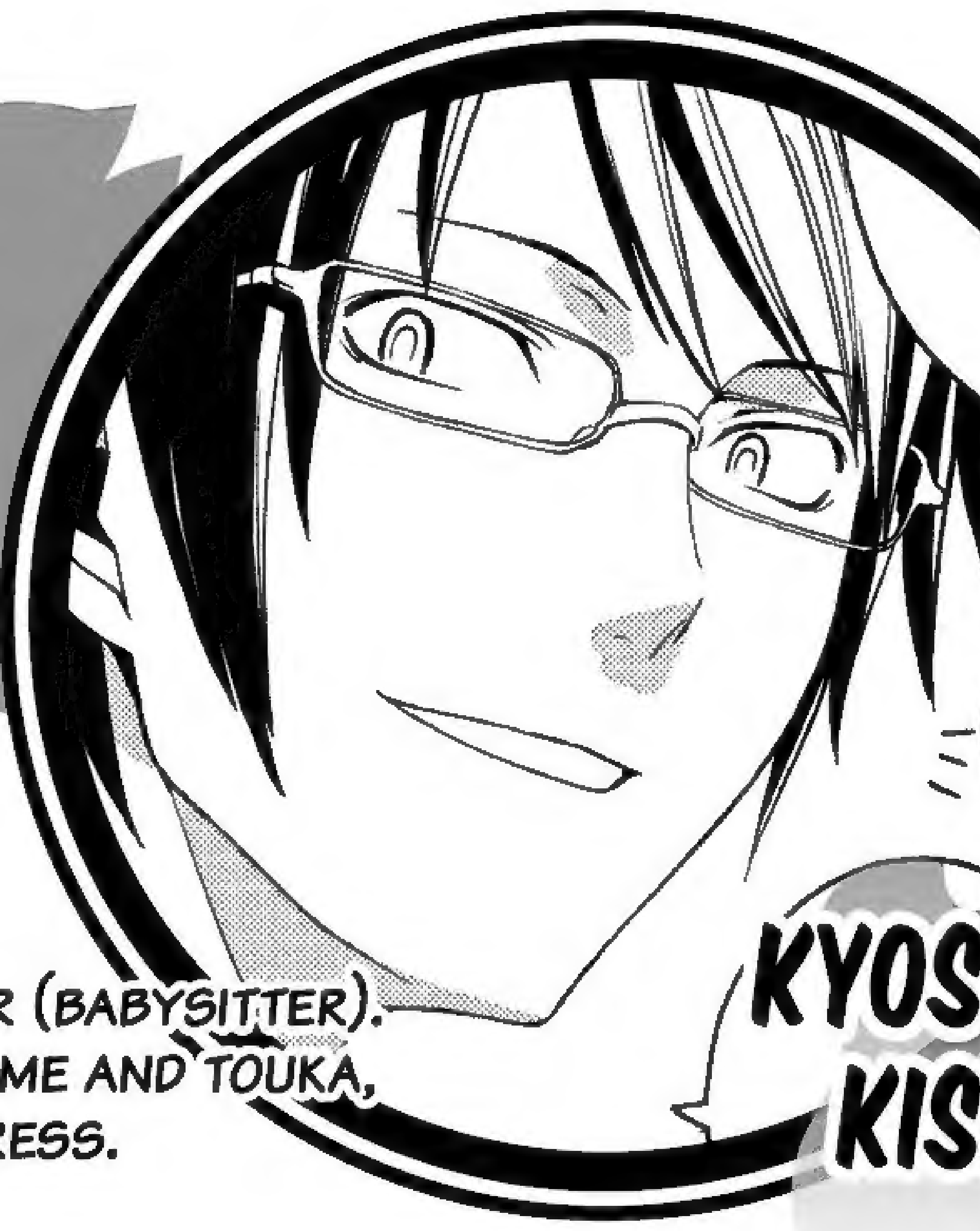


AO NANAMI

KOTOHA ISONE



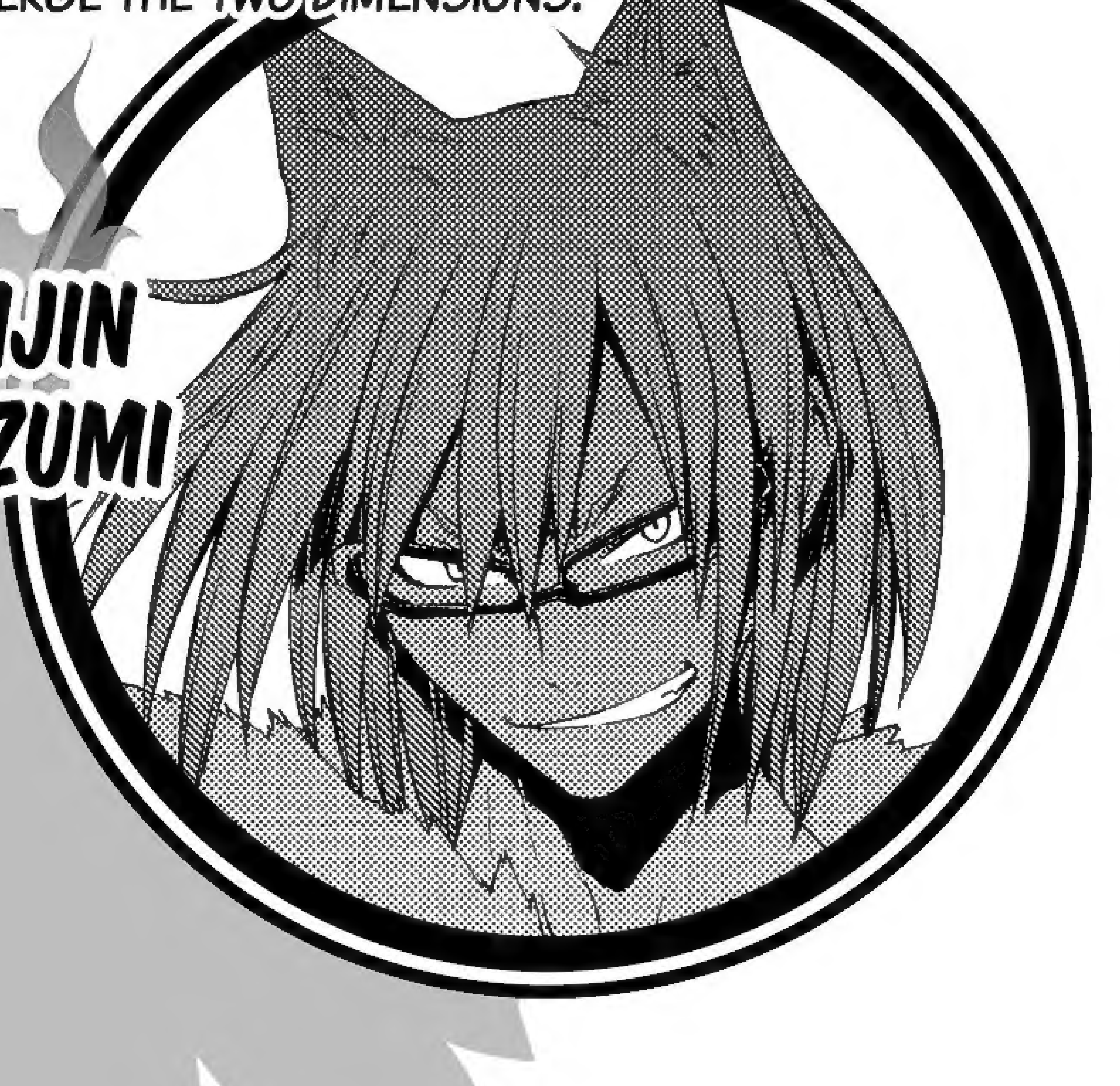
A PART-TIME WORKER AT THE HIIZUMI LIFE COUNSELING OFFICE. SHE WEARS GLASSES, IS INTO GIRLS, AND HAS BIG BOOBS, AMONG OTHER CLICHÉS, BUT SHE ALSO HAS THE MOST REFRESHING PERSONALITY.



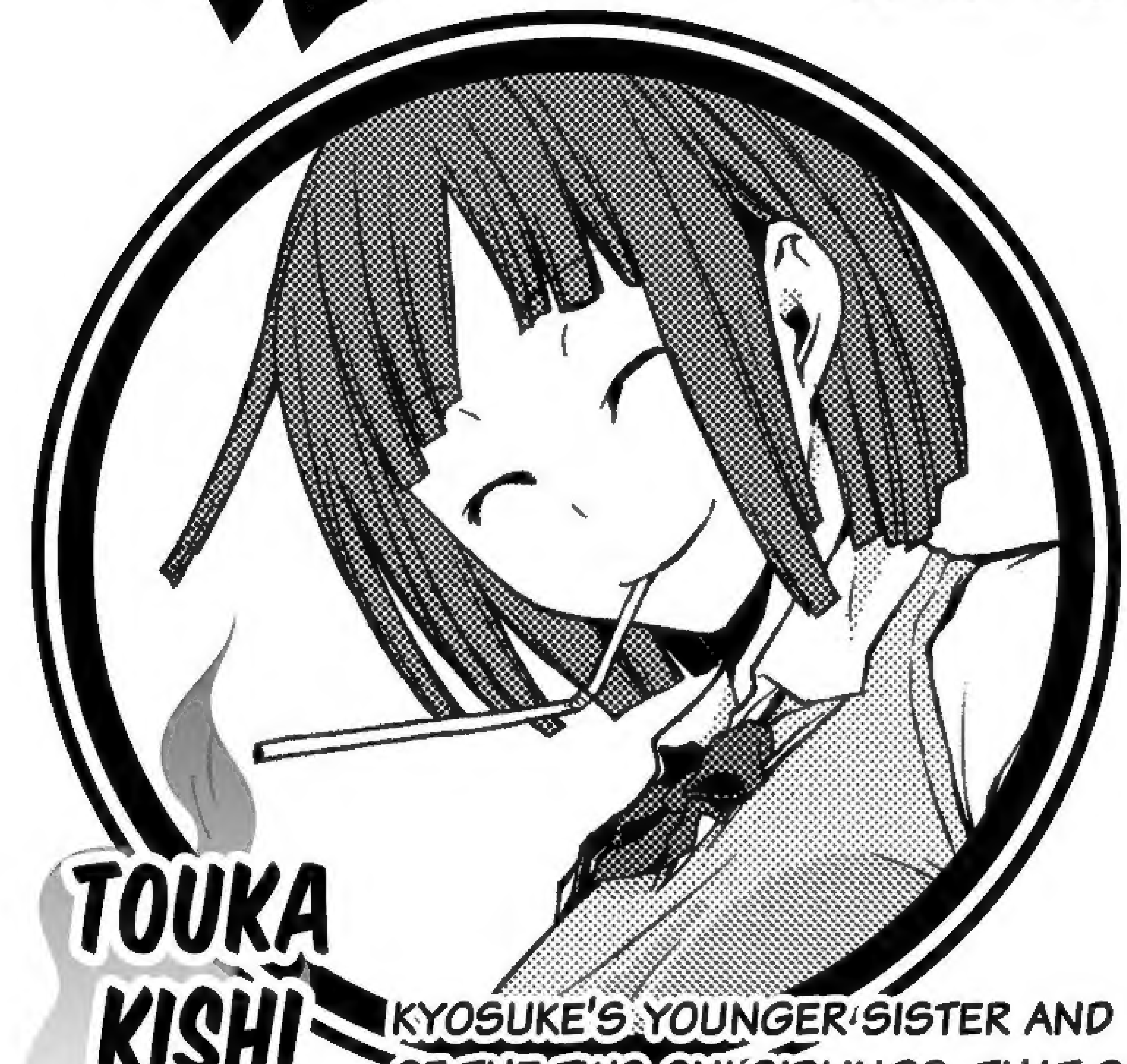
KYOSUKE KISHI

HIME'S ASSISTANT AND OVERSEER (BABYSITTER). HE HAS TO TAKE CARE OF BOTH HIME AND TOUKA, SO HIS DAYS ARE FILLED WITH STRESS.

A DESCENDANT OF ENYOU HIIZUMI. HE TOOK OVER THE BODY OF GIN, AO'S OLDER BROTHER, AND HE IS PLANNING TO MAKE THE SEVEN PILLARS BLOOM IN ORDER TO MERGE THE TWO DIMENSIONS.

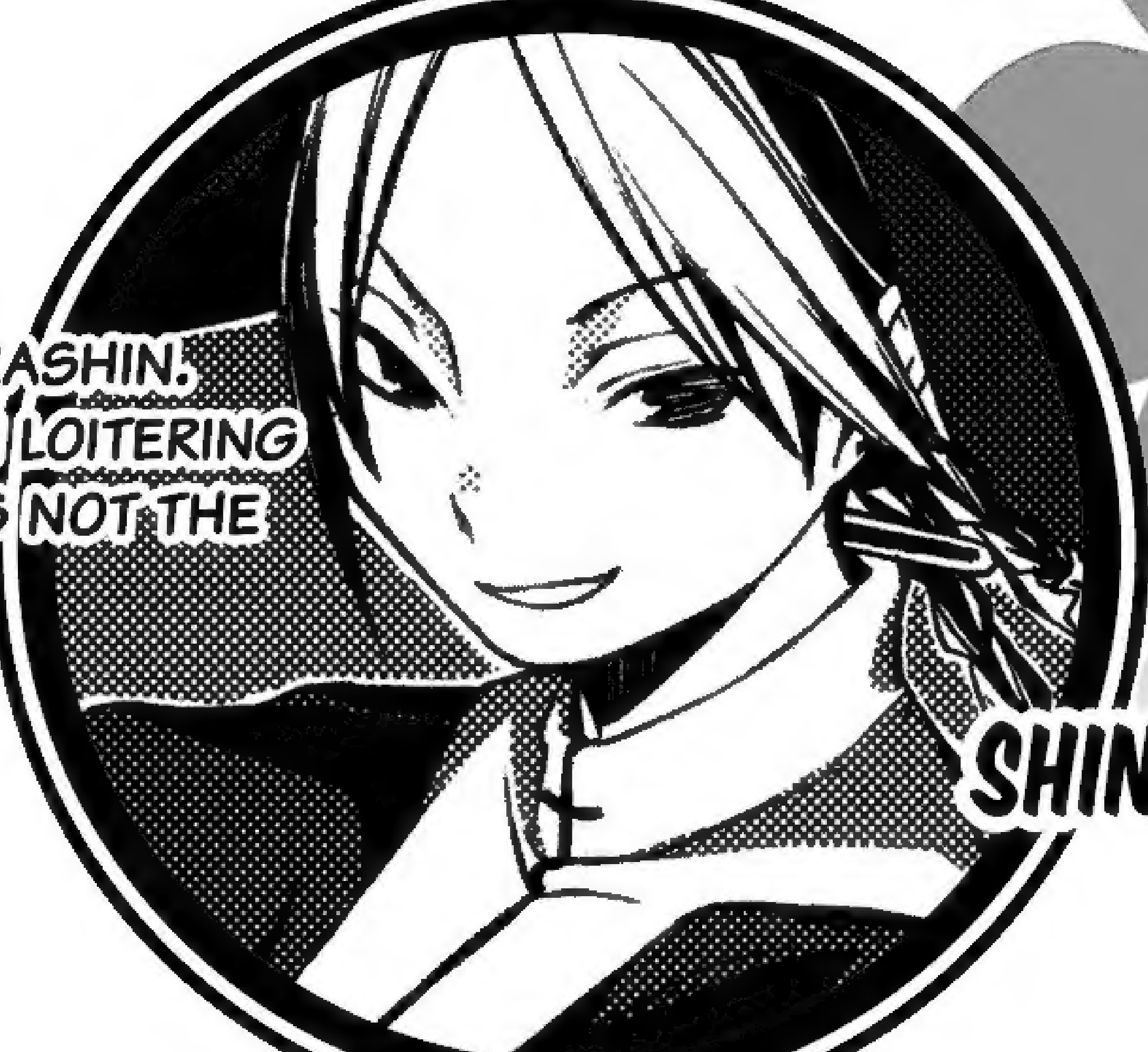


ENJIN HIIZUMI



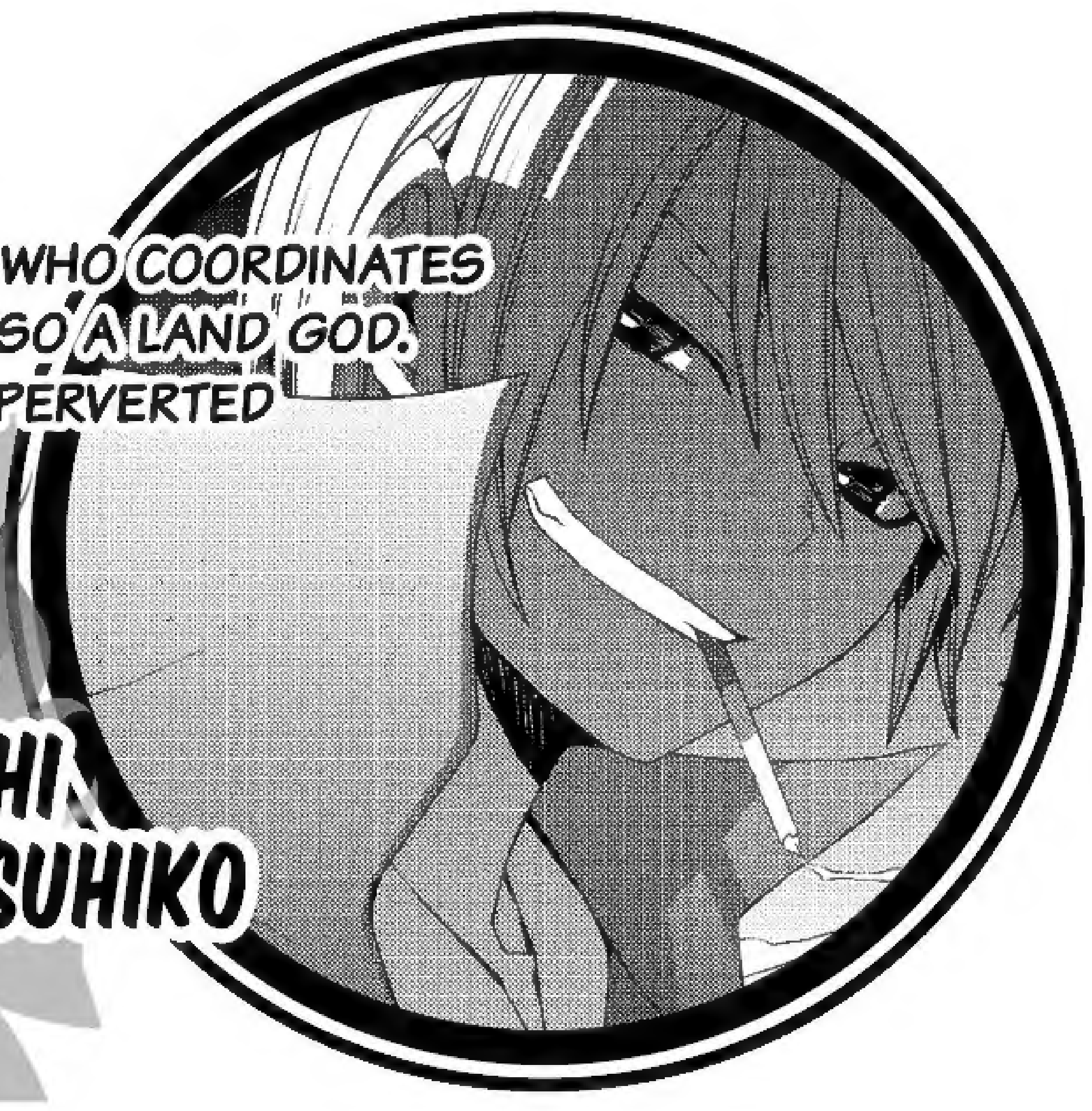
TOUKA KISHI

KYOSUKE'S YOUNGER SISTER AND THE FAIRER HALF OF THE TWO ONI SIBLINGS. THAT SAID, SHE LEADS THE MOST NORMAL LIFE, AS BEFITTING A HIGH-SCHOOL GIRL. SHE USED TO DO ARCHERY, BUT NOW PRACTICES AIKIDO.



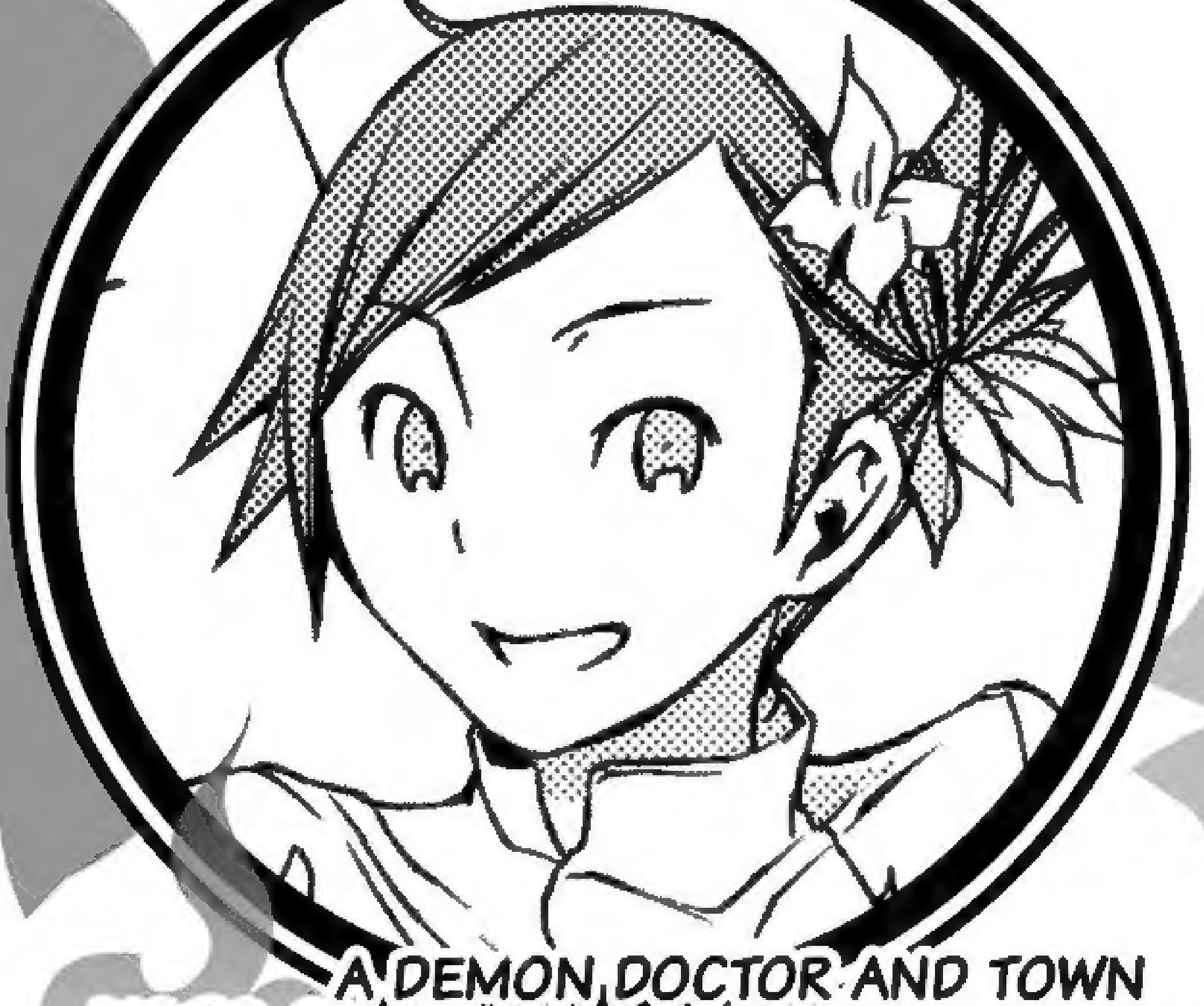
YAE SHINATSUHIKO

THE LAND GOD OF SAKURASHIN. SHE CAN OFTEN BE SEEN LOITERING AROUND TOWN, SO SHE'S NOT THE MOST DIGNIFIED DEITY.



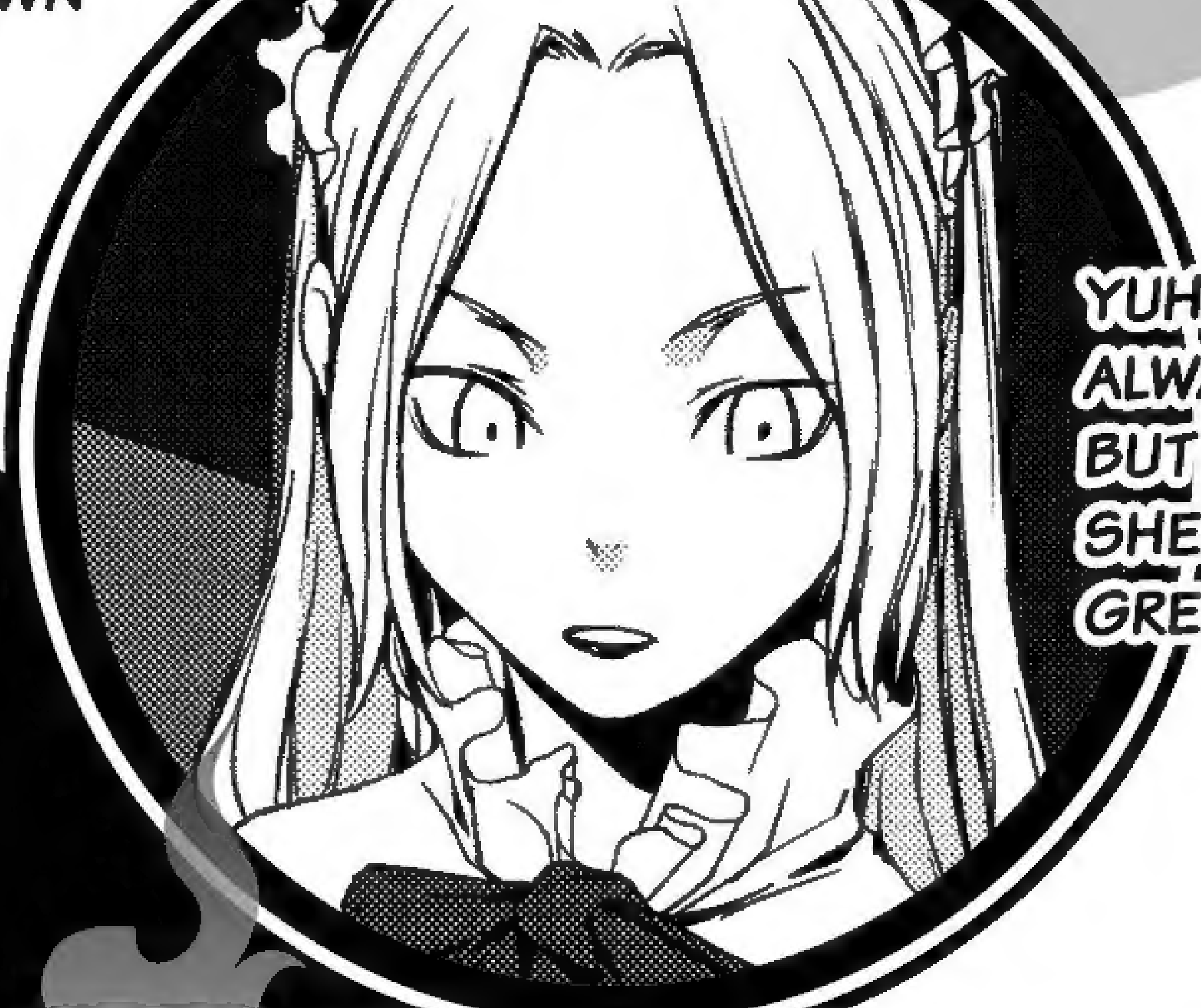
YUHI SHINATSUHIKO

THE DISTRICT MAYOR WHO COORDINATES THE TOWNS. HE IS ALSO A LAND GOD. DEEP DOWN, HE IS A PERVERTED OLD MAN.



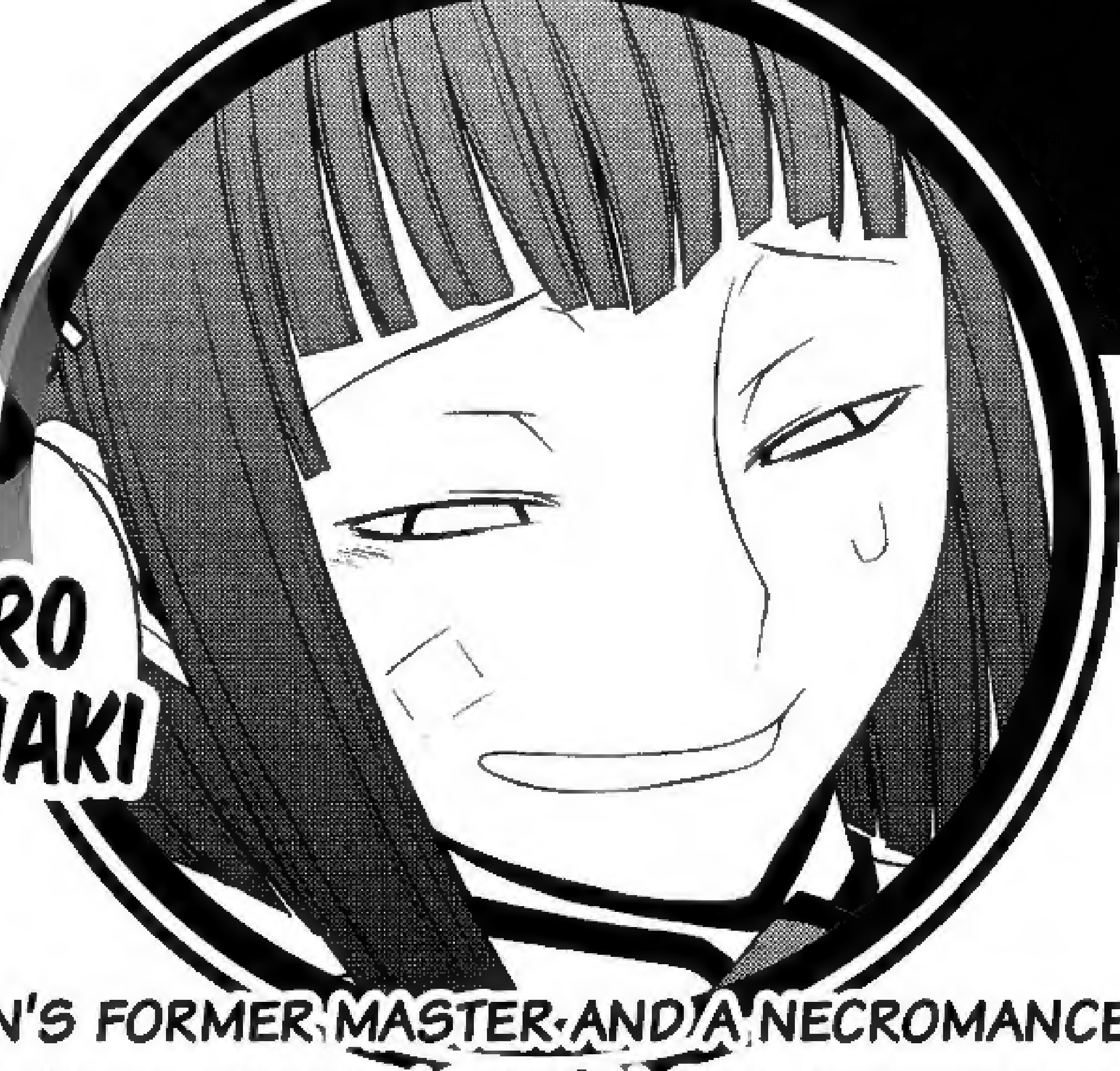
JURI

A DEMON DOCTOR AND TOWN ICON. SHE HAS BEEN ABSTAINING FROM SHOW BUSINESS LATELY.



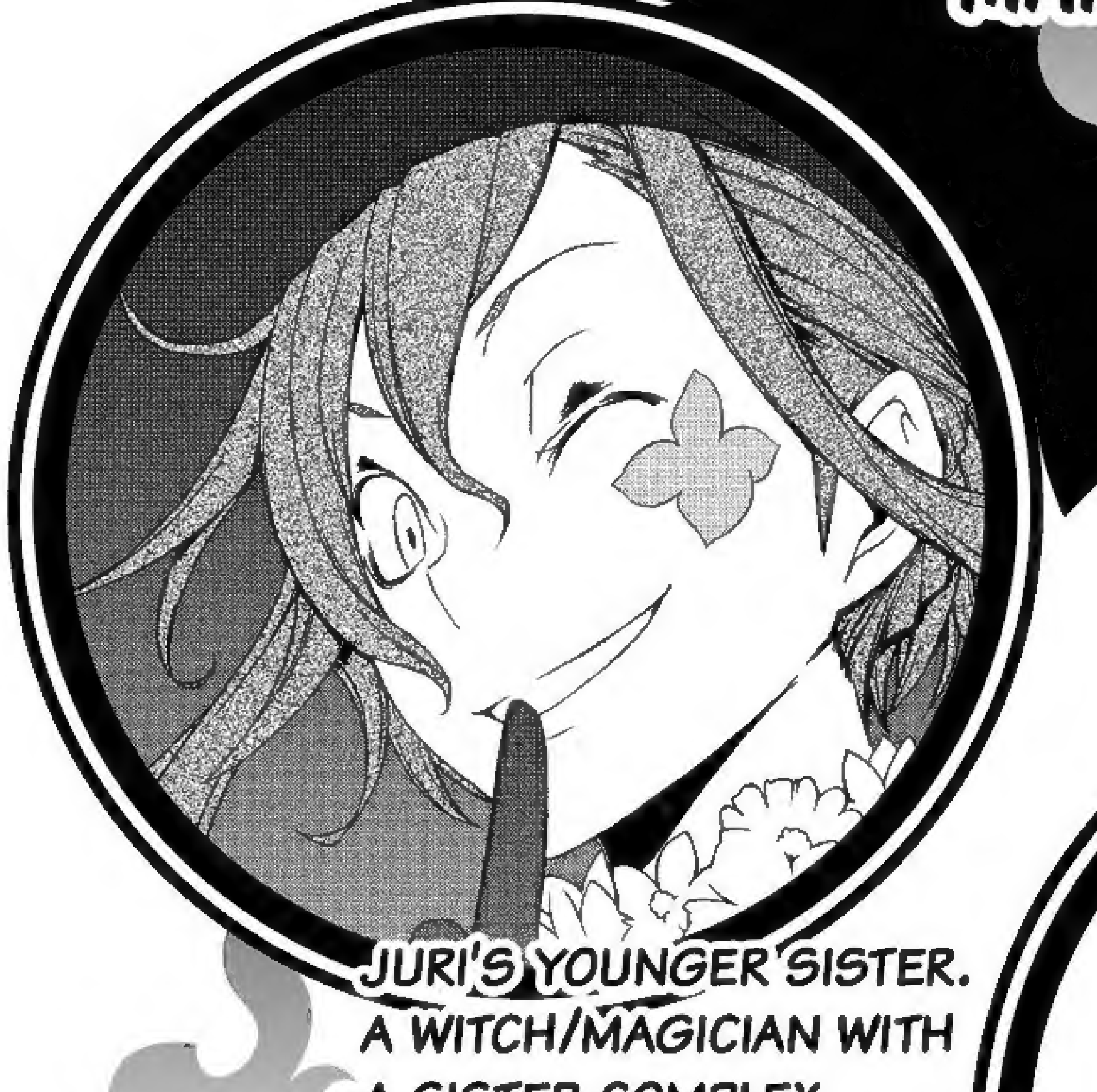
MARIABELL

YUHI'S SECRETARY. SHE IS ALWAYS ORDERED TO COSPLAY, BUT SHE SEEMS TO ENJOY IT. SHE IS ALSO JURI'S GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDMOTHER.



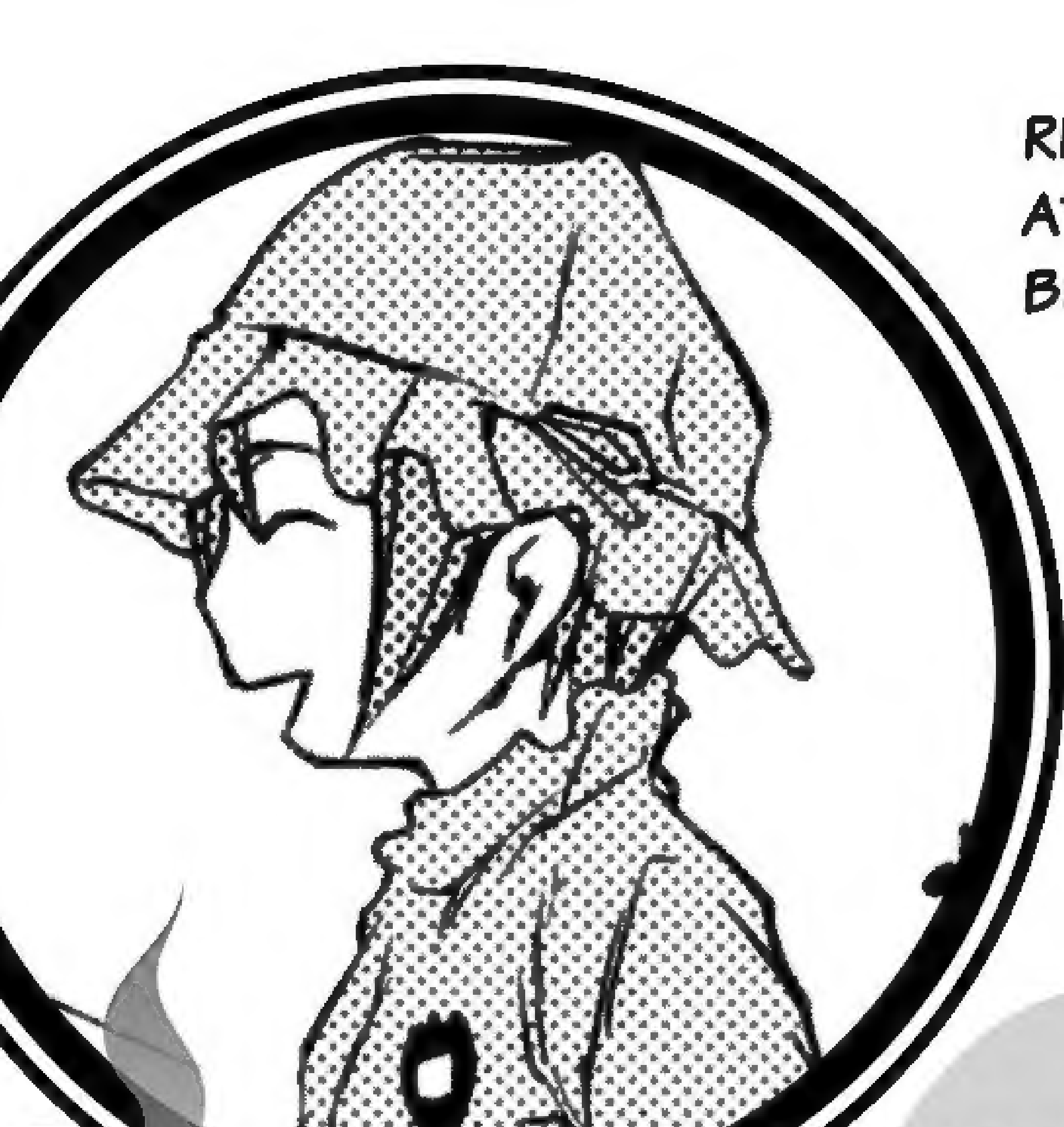
ZAKURO KURUMAKI

RIN'S FORMER MASTER AND A NECROMANCER, SHE ATTACKED SAKURASHIN IN ORDER TO TAKE BACK RIN BUT WAS THWARTED AND REFORMED.



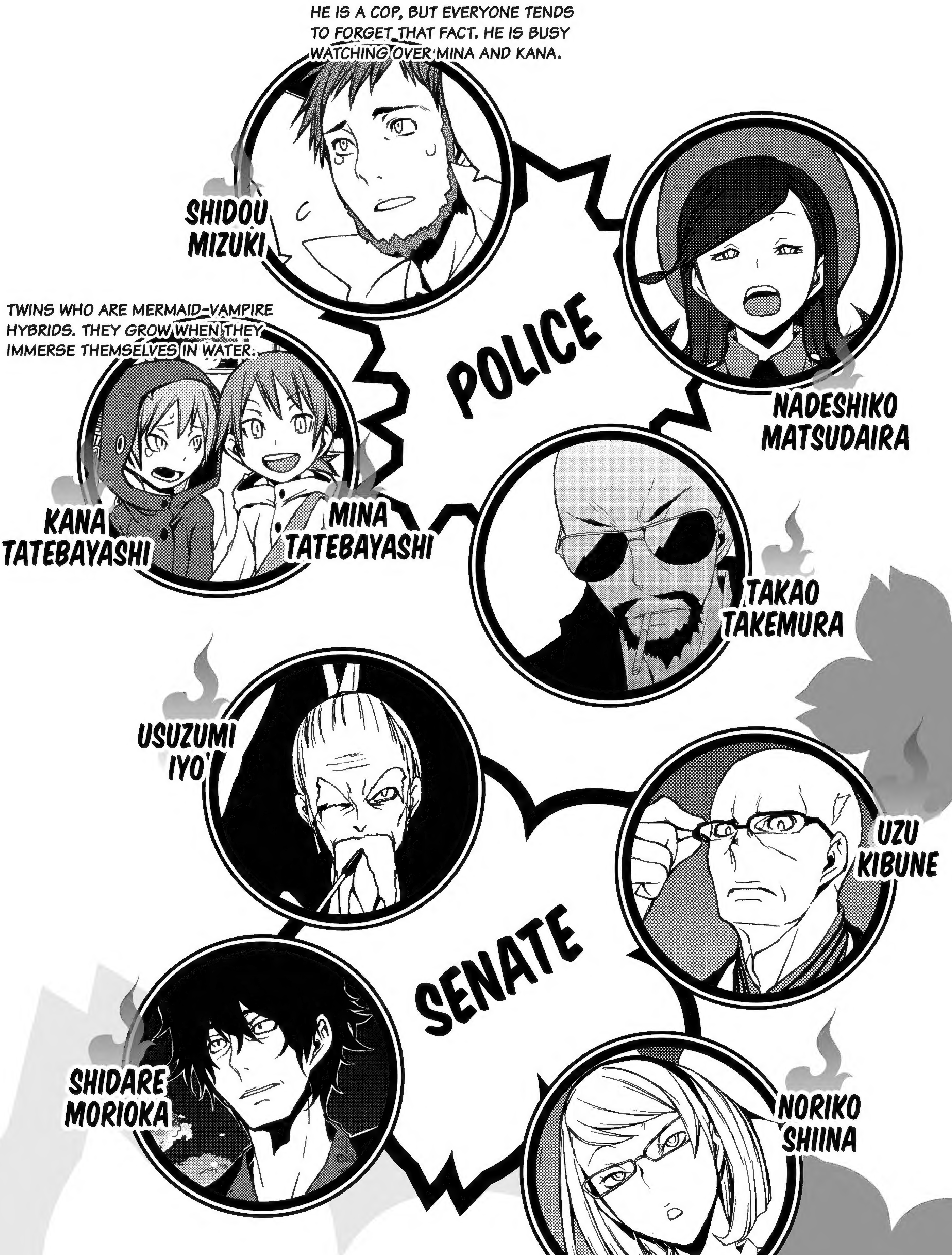
LILA

JURI'S YOUNGER SISTER. A WITCH/MAGICIAN WITH A SISTER COMPLEX.



RIN AZUMA

A JIANGSHI WHO WORKS AT A RAMEN RESTAURANT. IT SEEMS LIKE SHE'S ALWAYS SLACKING OFF, BUT SHE'S SURPRISINGLY DILIGENT. WAS KIDNAPPED BUT RETURNED SAFELY.


HE IS A COP, BUT EVERYONE TENDS TO FORGET THAT FACT. HE IS BUSY WATCHING OVER MINA AND KANA.
SHIDOU MIZUKI
NADESHIKO MATSUDAIRA
POLICE
TWINS WHO ARE MERMAID-VAMPIRE HYBRIDS. THEY GROW WHEN THEY IMMERSE THEMSELVES IN WATER.
MINA TATEBAYASHI
KANA TATEBAYASHI
TAKAO TAKEMURA
USUZUMI IYO
UZU KIBUNE
SENATE
SHIDARE MORIOKA
NORIKO SHIINA

OUTLINE

AS THE GANG TAKES A SLIGHT BREATHER FOLLOWING THE HAKONE ARC AND THE WEREWOLF COMMOTION, AN EIGHTH PILLAR SUDDENLY APPEARS OUT OF THIN AIR. FOR THE TIME BEING, HIME AND THE REST GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP BEFORE INVESTIGATING IN TYPICAL LEISURELY FASHION...

YOZAKURA QUARTET

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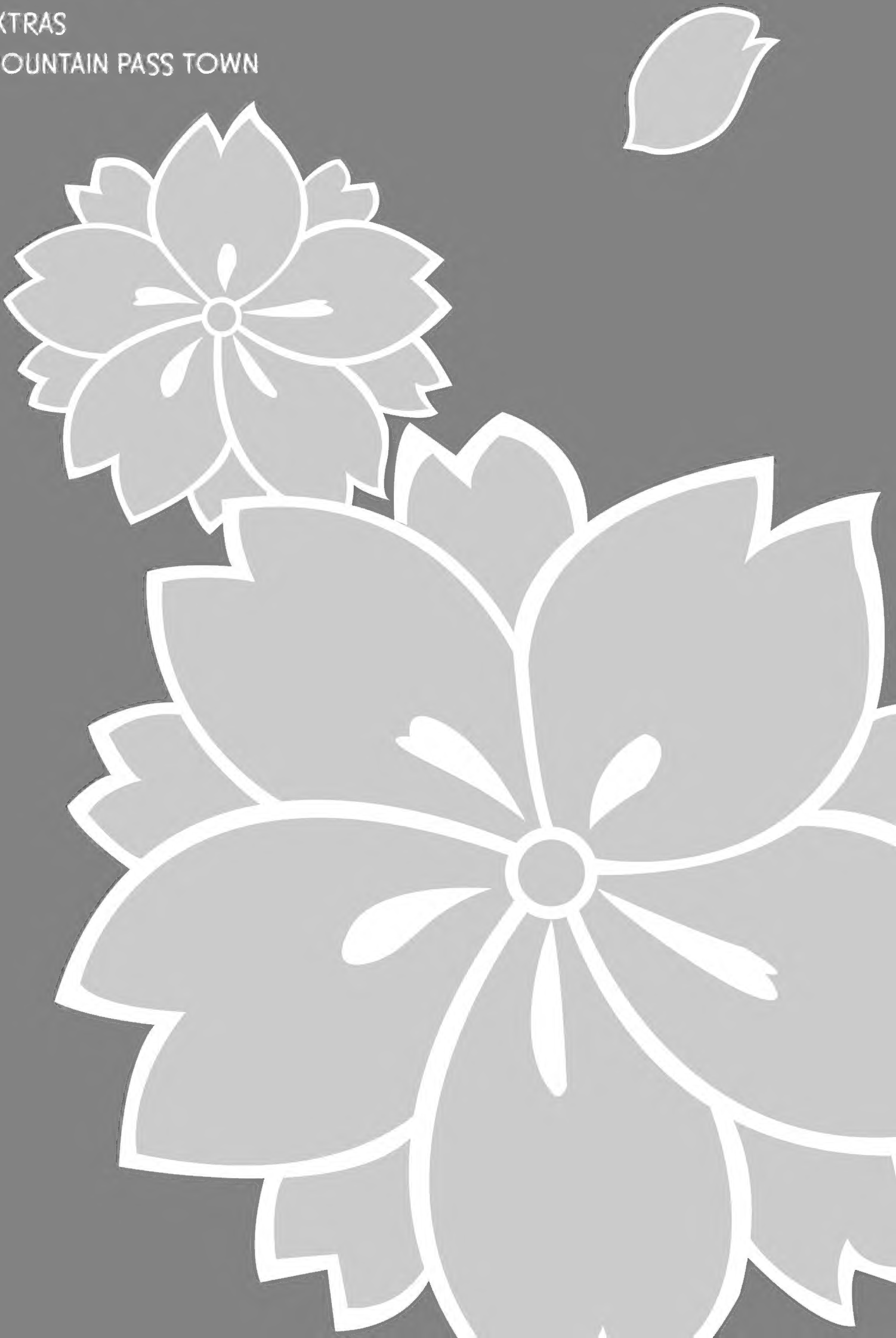
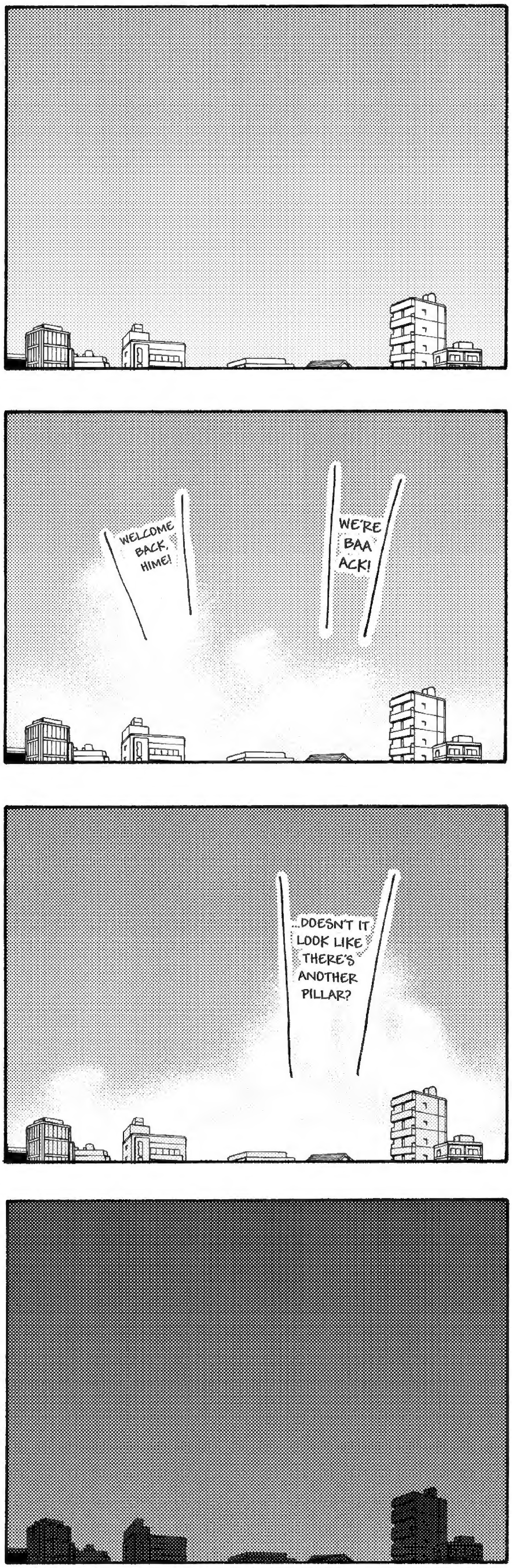


ピピピ…
BEEP BEEP BEEP
カチッ
CLICK
12 9 3
HNN! I SLEPT WELL.
GREAT WEATHER FOR DELIVERING THE PAPER...
OH, YEAH. HIME AND THE GANG ARE COMING BACK TODAY, HUH?
ROCK'n'ROLL HELLO TOWN
チュン
CHIRP
チュン…
CHIRP
THE PILLAR ALWAYS BLOCKS OUT THE MORNING SUN,
BUT IT SURE IS BRIGHT TODAY...
TMP
シャッ
SKSH
I GUESS WE'RE IN THE THICK OF SUMMER NOW...

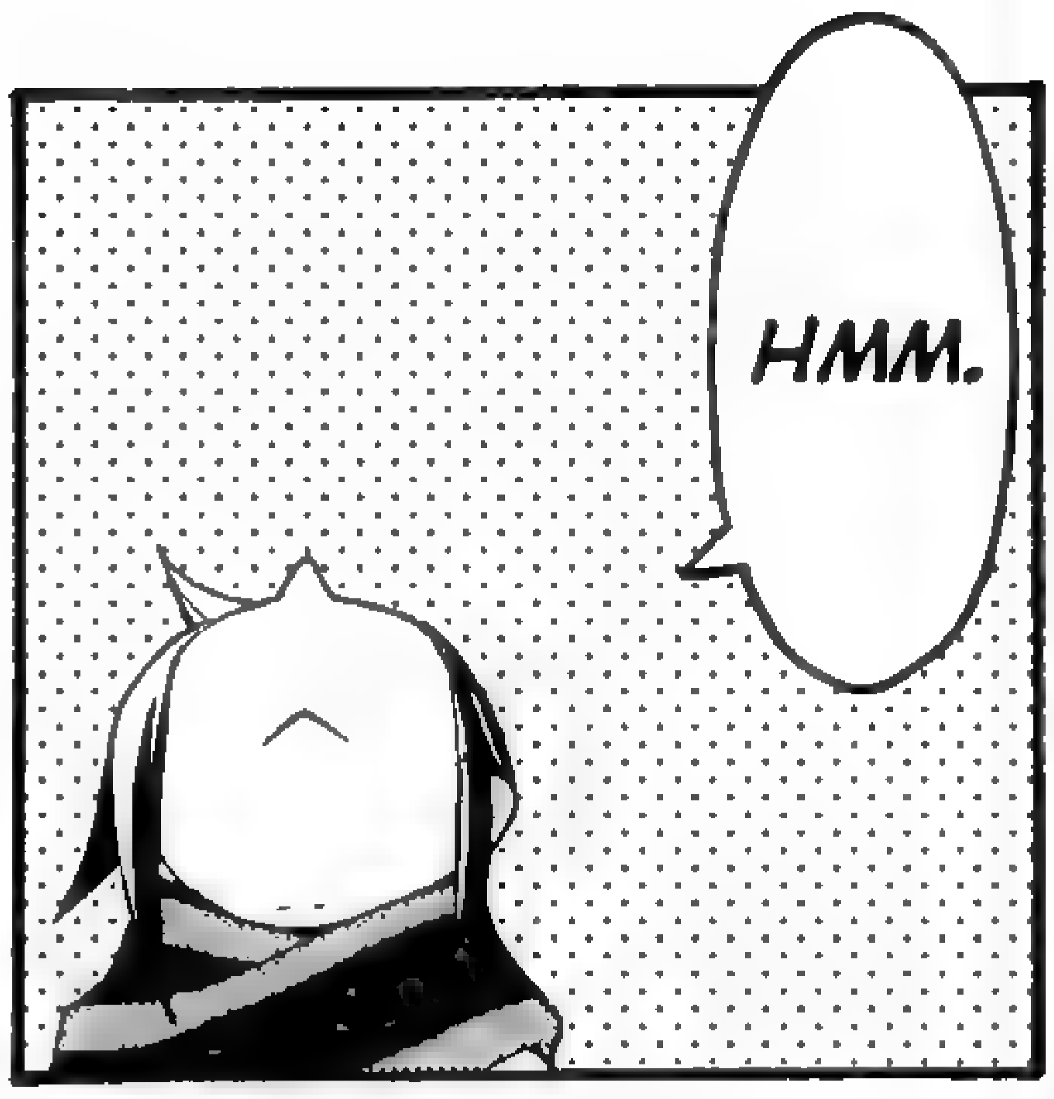
...HWA AAH?!
WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON?!

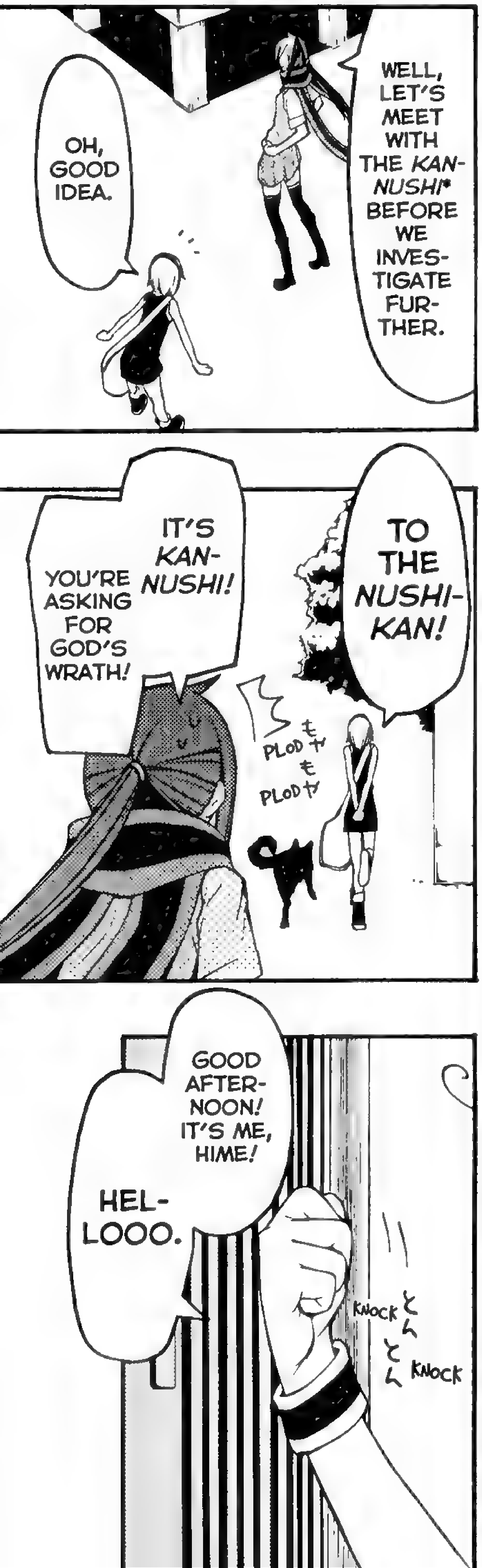
63^RD NIGHT STORY (PART ONE)


WE'RE BAA ACK!
WELCOME BACK, HIME!
...DOESN'T IT LOOK LIKE THERE'S ANOTHER PILLAR?

AND AFTER WAITING A NIGHT, WE LEISURELY ASSESS THE SITUATION...
PIT
PAT
WELL, THERE'S NO HELPING THAT SINCE BOTH JURI AND YAE-SAN STOPPED US.
THE PILLARS WON'T GO ANYWHERE! TONIGHT, YOU SHOULD JUST RECOVER FROM YOUR TRIP!
BUT I'M NOT REALLY TIRED SINCE I HAD A GOOD TIME...
WELL, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO INVESTIGATE ALL THE MORE, THEN!
PIT
HERE WE ARE.

...I SEE.
IT'S NOT THAT THERE'S ONE MORE PILLAR, BUT RATHER THAT ONE SPLIT INTO TWO.
OR RATHER... YOU COULD SAY IT LOOKS MORE LIKE A TREE NOW.

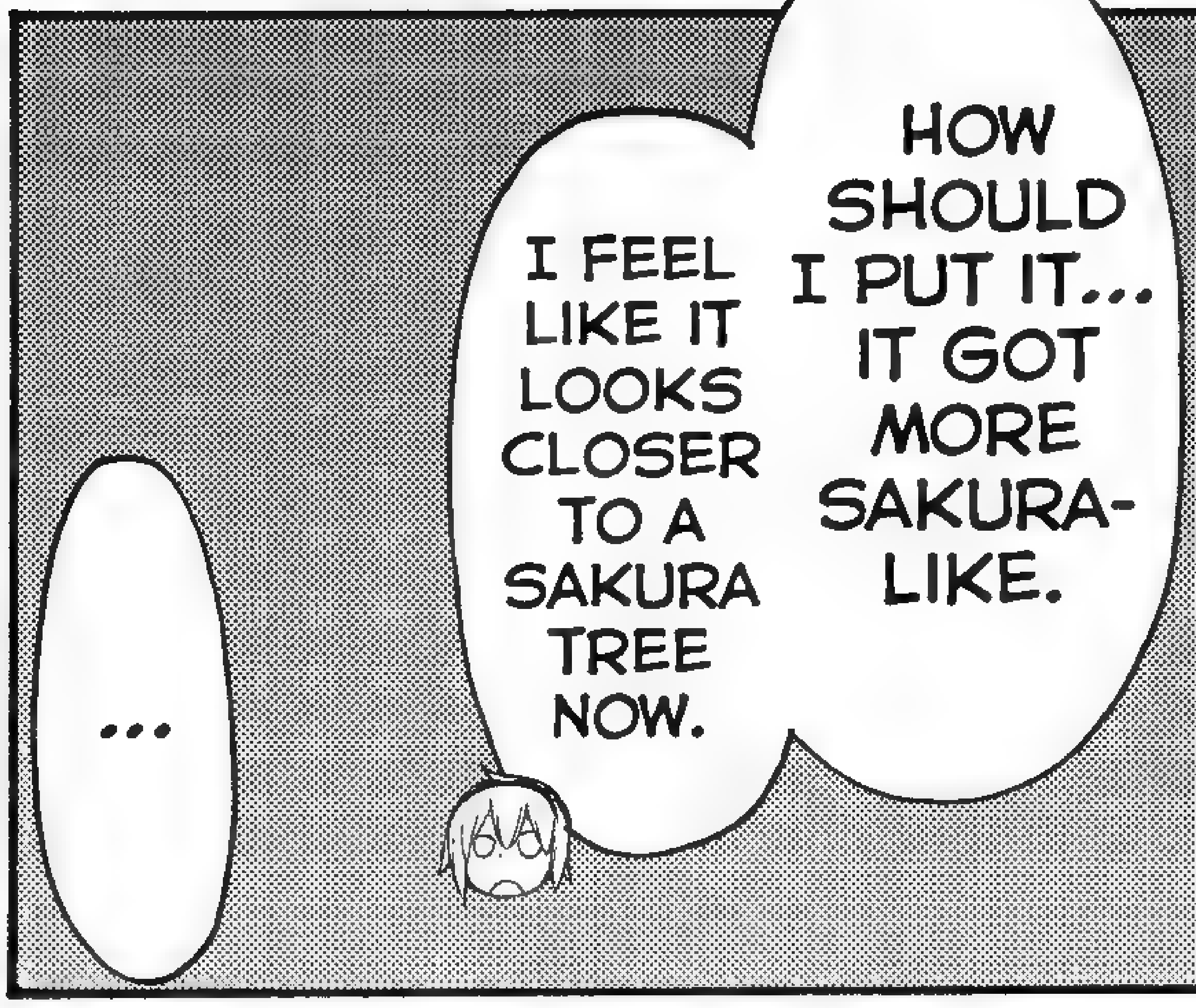


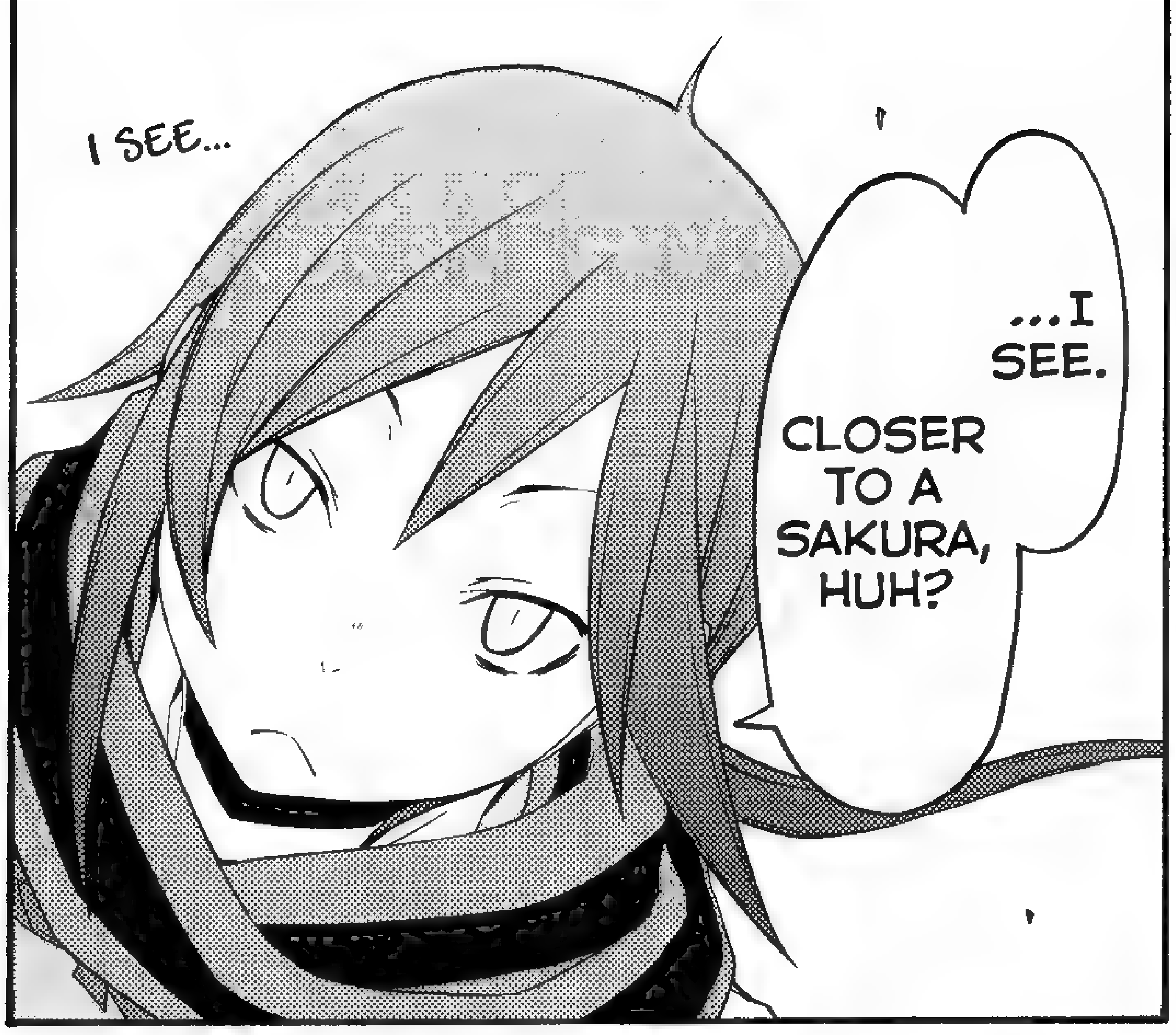

WELL, LET'S MEET WITH THE *KANNUSHI** BEFORE WE INVESTIGATE FURTHER.
OH, GOOD IDEA.
TO THE *NUSHIKAN!*
IT'S *KANNUSHI!*
YOU'RE ASKING FOR GOD'S WRATH!
PLOD もた
PLOD もた
GOOD AFTERNOON! IT'S ME, HIME!
HELLOOO.
KNOCK とん
とん KNOCK

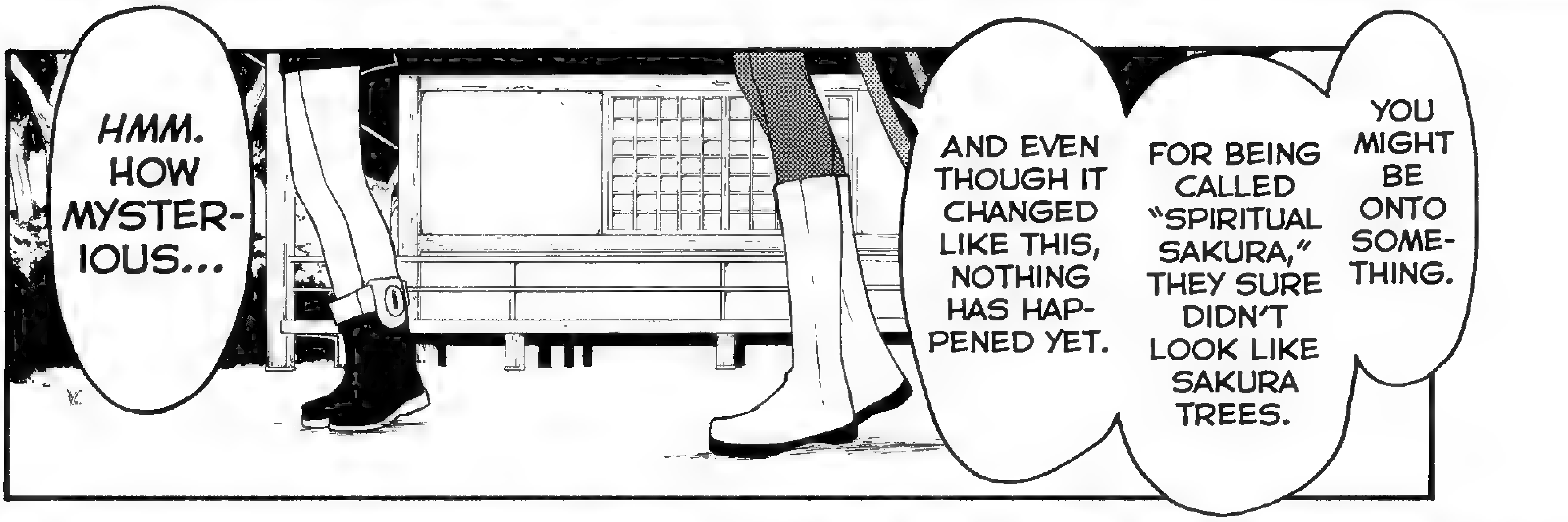
*The chief priest of a Shinto shrine.

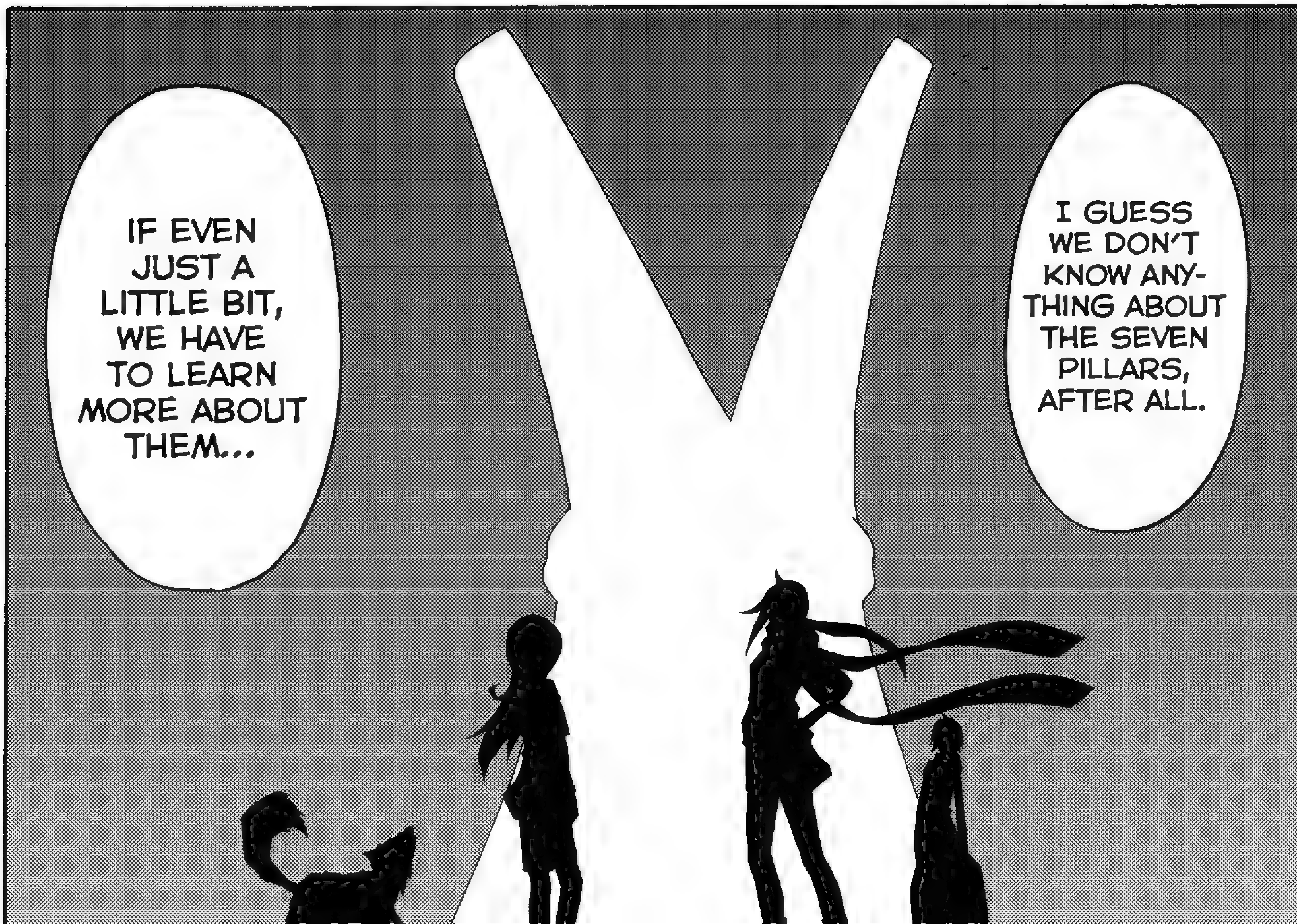
NUSHI-KAAAN!
RATTLE ガラ
ガラ RATTLE
SHE SAID IT, TOO!
SHE JUST WANTED TO SAY IT...
ばた ばた PIT PAT
COMIII-ING!
SORRY! DAD'S OUT ON OTHER BUSINESS!
ばた PAT
ばた PIT
ARE YOU HERE TO SEE THE PILLAR?
YEAH, THANKS.
...WEARING TRAINING GEAR UNDER PRIESTESS CLOTHES, HUH?
HOW ECCENTRIC...
I HAD CLUB TODAY.
OH! IT'S THE RUMORED POLICE DOG.
PLEASED TO MEET YOU. MY NAME IS ROKKAKU.
CHARMED.
NADESHIKO-SAN'S HERE, TOO.

HEL-LOOO.
WORKING HARD, I SEE, NADESHIKO-SAN.
GOOD AFTERNOON. DID YOU SLEEP WELL?
OH! WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE, ROKKAKU-KUN?
I HAVE A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPARTMENT.
HMM.
ALL RIGHT. THANKS.
はす
PLAP
DID YOU FIGURE ANYTHING OUT, NADESHIKO-SAN?
MMM. NOT REALLY.
THE PILLARS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A MYSTERY, BUT SINCE THEY'VE BEEN A PART OF THIS TOWN FOREVER, I NEVER REALLY THOUGHT TOO DEEPLY ABOUT THEM.
WHAT I DO KNOW IS THAT THEY'RE VERY IMPORTANT.
I THINK THAT GOES FOR MOST PEOPLE.
NOW THAT ONE CHANGED LIKE THIS, THEIR PRESENCE IS SUDDENLY SUPER APPARENT.


HOW SHOULD I PUT IT... IT GOT MORE SAKURA-LIKE.
I FEEL LIKE IT LOOKS CLOSER TO A SAKURA TREE NOW.
...


...I SEE.
CLOSER TO A SAKURA, HUH?
I SEE...

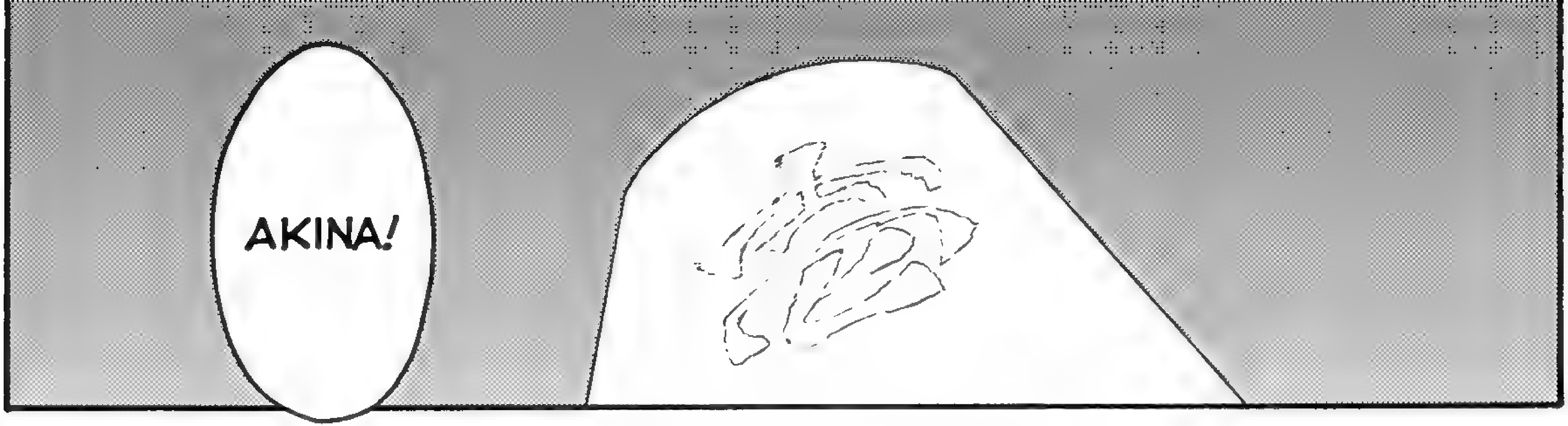

YOU MIGHT BE ONTO SOMETHING.
FOR BEING CALLED "SPIRITUAL SAKURA," THEY SURE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE SAKURA TREES.
AND EVEN THOUGH IT CHANGED LIKE THIS, NOTHING HAS HAPPENED YET.
HMM. HOW MYSTERIOUS...


I GUESS WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE SEVEN PILLARS, AFTER ALL.
IF EVEN JUST A LITTLE BIT, WE HAVE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM...

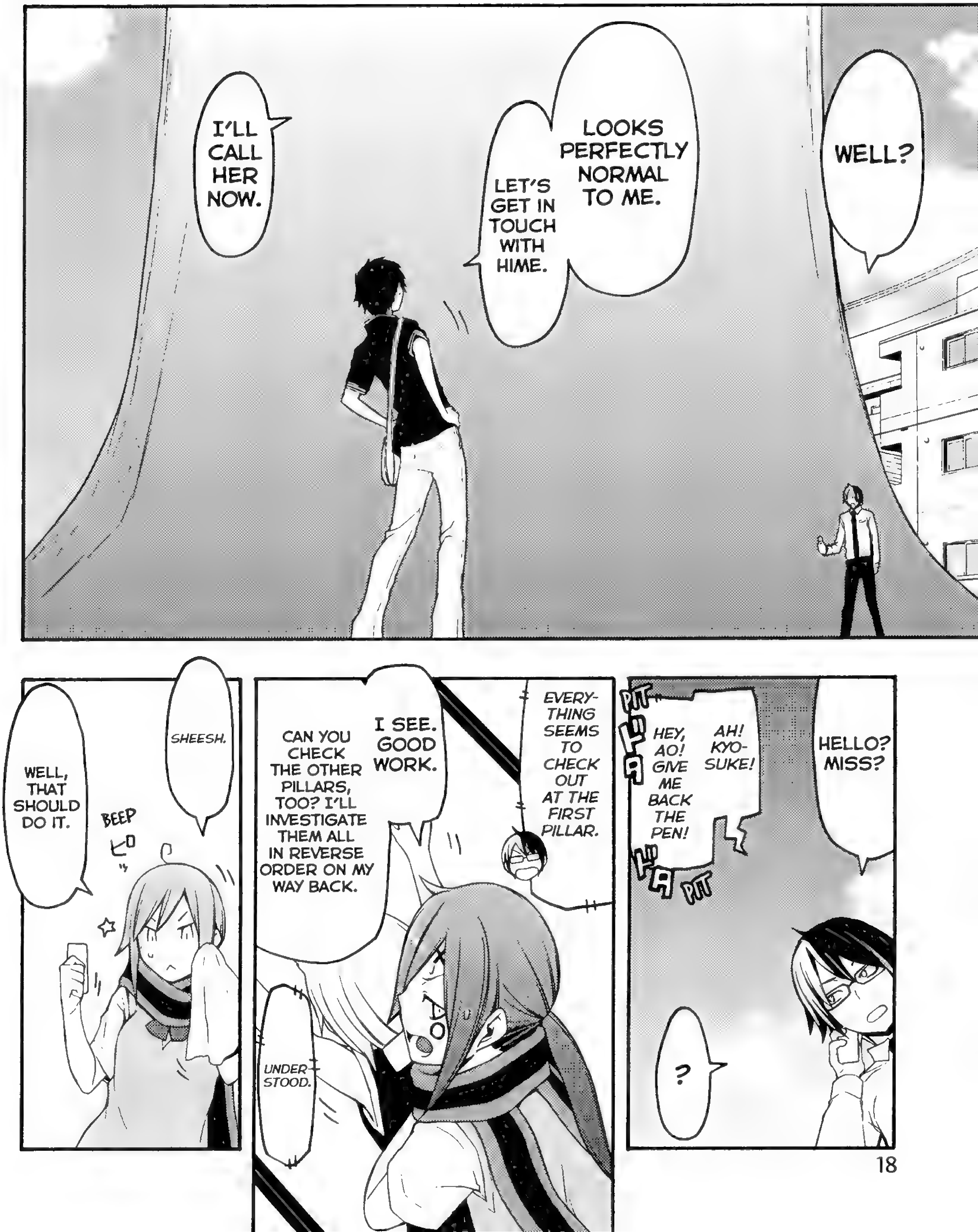
MAYBE THERE'S A BOOK IN THE ARCHIVE AT AKINA'S OFFICE THAT'LL HELP US.
I SHOULD CHECK LATER...
THERE WAS AN ARCHIVE?
THE ONLY OTHER ONES WHO MIGHT KNOW SOMETHING ARE...
TMP
TMP
HEAVE... HO.
IT SURE IS INCONVENIENT NOT BEING ABLE TO GET UP HERE BY CAR.
ずしっ...
SHUCK
OH, MY, MORE VISITORS... *GEH!* NADESHIKO...
WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN, SHIINA-CHAN?
PLEASE DON'T GET IN MY WAY. I DON'T HAVE TIME TO HUMOR YOU TODAY.
THIS IS A VALUABLE CHANCE TO GATHER DATA ON THE SEVEN PILLARS.
どしゃ
DOMF
SAWAKI, DO YOU MIND IF I USE THE SHRINE'S OFFICE?
HM? SURE. YOU'RE FREE TO, BUT...
I'LL HAVE TO PICK HER BRAIN LATER.

す
SNORE
す
SNORE
OH, YOU ALREADY HAD A GUEST.
I OFFERED HER TEA AND SNACKS SINCE SHE WAS JUST WANDERING AROUND, BUT SHE FELL ASLEEP.
Z Z Z
SHE MIGHT BE TIRED FROM CUTTING LOOSE AT HAKONE.
DO GODS REALLY GET TIRED?
むにゃ むにゃ
GRUMBLE GRUMBLE
SO, WHAT DO YOU NEED THE OFFICE FOR, HIME?
DO YOU HAVE ANY HUGE SHEETS OF PAPER?
PAPER?
I THINK WE HAVE SOME USED FOR RITUALS...

キュポン
POP
AL-RIGHTY...
I THINK WE SHOULD TRY ASSESSING THE SITUATION AS A WHOLE AND NOT JUST IN REGARDS TO THE SEVEN PILLARS.
THINGS WE KNOW, ANYWAY.
GOOD CALL! LET'S DO IT!
SHOULDN'T AKINA BE HERE FOR THAT, TOO?
HE'S WITH KYOSUKE RIGHT NOW.
WELL, I GUESS WE CAN START NOW AND HAVE HIM ADD THINGS LATER.
BEFORE THAT...
パキン
SNAP
...LET'S WRITE UP A DRAFT IN PENCIL FIRST.
STRESSING QUALITY...
WHY BOTHER?
LET'S JUST GET IT DONE QUICKLY.


AKINA!

Pillar: One


WELL?
LOOKS PERFECTLY NORMAL TO ME.
LET'S GET IN TOUCH WITH HIME.
I'LL CALL HER NOW.
HELLO? MISS?
AH! KYO-SUKE!
HEY, AO! GIVE ME BACK THE PEN!
PIT ドタ ドタ PIT
?
EVERY-THING SEEMS TO CHECK OUT AT THE FIRST PILLAR.
I SEE. GOOD WORK.
CAN YOU CHECK THE OTHER PILLARS, TOO? I'LL INVESTIGATE THEM ALL IN REVERSE ORDER ON MY WAY BACK.
UNDER-STOOD.
SHEESH.
WELL, THAT SHOULD DO IT.
BEEP ピロ

AS FAR AS I KNOW, THIS IS THE CURRENT SITUATION.
WHAT DO YOU THINK, NADESHIKO-SAN?
SENATE
ONMYODO
MAGIC-LIKE SCIENCE.
ALLIES OF HUMANS.
SEVEN PILLARS
BLOOM NEXT SPRING
APPEARED LONG AGO AFTER ENYOU HIIZUMI'S BRANCH FAMILY WAS SACRIFICED.
NEIGH. ASSOC.
STOPPING
ME
POLICE
REASSURING BACKUP.
HASTENING
AKINA HIIZUMI
HEAD FAMILY
HATES
ENJIN HIIZUMI
BRANCH FAMILY
HALF-DEMON CORPS
ZAKURO (FORMER)
LILA (NOT)
?
ROKKAKU (FORMER)
SAME INTERESTS.
FALLEN
LOTS OF THEM.
TUNING
POWER TO BRING
POWER TO SEND
IT FALLS IN LINE WITH WHAT THE POLICE KNOW, TOO.
THE ONLY ONES WHO MIGHT KNOW MORE ARE THE SENATE OR AKINA-KUN...
OUR OFFICE AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION ALWAYS PROVIDE INFORMATION, SO I DOUBT IT'LL CHANGE MUCH.

CURRENTLY, OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM IS THIS.
SEVEN PILLARS
BLOOM NEXT SPRING
とん TAP
THE BLOOMING OF THE SEVEN PILLARS SAID TO OCCUR NEXT SPRING.
WHEN THE SEVEN PILLARS BLOSSOM, THIS REALM AND THE NEXT WILL COMPLETELY MERGE, AND THIS REALM WILL OVERFLOW WITH BAD DEMONS.
SO, WE HAVE TO STOP THAT.
Z z z
SIMPLE ENOUGH.
YOU'RE SURE IT'LL HAPPEN IN SPRING?
IT DEFINITELY WON'T BE ANY LATER,
BUT IT COULD HAPPEN SOONER.
THE ONE TRYING TO HASTEN THINGS...
...IS ENJIN HIIZUMI.
ENJIN HIIZUMI
TRYING TO HASTEN THINGS... SO THEY'LL STILL BLOOM IF HE LEAVES THEM ALONE?
TO PUT IT IN OTHER WORDS...
RIGHT.
"EVEN IF WE DEFEAT ENJIN, IT WON'T STOP THE BLOSSOMING."
THIS IS SURPRISINGLY TROUBLESOME.

SO HOW DO WE STOP THE DIMENSIONS FROM MERGING?
WELL...
...WE COULD GET RID OF THE SEVEN PILLARS.
THAT IS ALSO SIMPLE ENOUGH.
TUNING
SQUEAK
キュッ
BY GETTING RID OF THE PILLARS, THE DIMENSIONS ARE PREVENTED FROM MERGING.
THEN THAT MEANS...
RIGHT.
THE SOURCE OF THE FUSION LIES IN THE SEVEN PILLARS THEMSELVES.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, SOURCE?
ORIGINALLY, THINGS COULDN'T COME AND GO BETWEEN THE DIMENSIONS VERY EASILY.
NOT EVEN WITH THE HIIZUMI FAMILY'S TUNING POWER.
IN ORDER TO RAISE THE SUCCESS RATE OF TUNING, THE SEVEN PILLARS WERE FORMED AS A LANDMARK BETWEEN THE TWO DIMENSIONS.
WITH THE PILLARS AS A LANDMARK ALIGNING THE DIMENSIONS' COORDINATES, TUNING BECAME POSSIBLE.
AS A RESULT, THE SUCCESS RATE OF TUNING SUPPOSEDLY SKYROCKETED.

SINCE THEY SERVE AS A CHANNEL BETWEEN THE DIMENSIONS, IT'S NOT SURPRISING THAT THEIR EXISTENCE ITSELF IS WHAT'S CAUSING THE DIMENSIONAL FUSION.
HMM...
THEN WHY NOT JUST CHOP 'EM DOWN?
APPARENTLY, EVEN IF WE CHOP THEM DOWN, THEY'LL STILL REMAIN FUNCTIONAL.
WHICH MEANS OUR ONLY OPTION IS TO HAVE AKINA SEND THEM TO THE OTHER SIDE WITH TUNING, BUT...
...THE HIIZUMI POWER USES ONE'S OWN BODY AS COLLATERAL.
THE MORE SOMEONE USES IT, THE MORE THEY SLIP OUT OF SYNC WITH THIS WORLD.
SO, IF AKINA TRIES TO TUNE SOMETHING HE CAN'T HANDLE LIKE THE SEVEN PILLARS, HE'LL BE IN BIG TROUBLE AFTER JUST ONE.
HE'LL TURN OUT LIKE *THAT*...
THAT?
THEN IS THERE NO OTHER WAY?
ガラッ SLIDE
NOT NECESSARILY.
UP WE GO.

DID YOU TAKE YOUR MEASUREMENTS?
SLIP ぬ
THE DATA IS ANALYZING NOW.
I'M GOING TO BORROW YOUR OUTLET.
BITE ぱく
SHIINA-SAN SMOKES?
IT'S CHOCOLATE.
CHOCOLATE?!
YAAAY! CAN I HAVE ONE?
SHIINA-SAN, WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY NOT NECESSARILY?
...
IT'S SIMPLE. WE JUST HAVE TO OFFER SOMETHING ELSE AS A TRIBUTE IN PLACE OF THE BURDEN ON AKINA-KUN'S BODY.
AND THAT SOMETHING MUST BE A "POWER" THAT DEVIATES FROM THIS REALM'S PRINCIPLES.
YOU MEAN...?
YES.

WE'LL USE THE DEMONS' OWN DEMONIC POWER AS TRIBUTE.
SINCE THERE ARE SEVEN PILLARS...THE LIVES OF EVERY DEMON IN TOWN SHOULD BE JUST ENOUGH.
ぎゅっ
PULL
YOU'RE KIDDING...
THE SENATE IS ON THE SIDE OF HUMANS FIRST AND FOREMOST.
THEREFORE, THAT'S THE METHOD THE SENATE WILL PROCEED WITH FIRST.
...
THAT BEING SAID...
...IF A METHOD IS FOUND THAT DOESN'T REQUIRE THAT, THEN OF COURSE WE'LL GO WITH THAT.
NOT EVEN OUR OWN REPRESENTATIVE WANTS TO GO THAT FAR IF IT'S AVOIDABLE.

THE SENATE ISN'T HEARTLESS, YOU KNOW.
BUT...
...WHAT IF WE CAN'T FIND A METHOD THAT DOESN'T SACRIFICE THE DEMONS?
THEN WE'LL DO IT...
...WITHOUT HESITATION.
...AWKWARD.
UMM...
I MORE OR LESS GET THE DEAL WITH DEMONS AND HUMANS...
...BUT HOW WILL THIS TOWN TREAT HALF-DEMONS LIKE ME?

AS FAR AS HALF-DEMONS GO, YOU MIGHT WANT TO ASK KOTOHA-CHAN.
SHE'S BEEN A HALF-DEMON THE LONGEST IN TOWN.
I SEE...
KOTOHA, HM?
SHE'S CERTAINLY GOTTEN MORE CHEERFUL...
...COMPARED TO BACK THEN.
REALLY?
WELL, IT'S TRUE THAT SHE WAS HARD TO APPROACH BEFORE.
YOU THINK SO?
KOTOHA-CHAN'S JUST KOTOHA-CHAN!
I DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING BAD BY IT...
WELL, YEAH, BUT...
HMM...
YANK
ガッ
SAWAKI, WHERE IS BATHROOM?! I'M GOING TO USE YOUR TUB!
S-SURE.
TAKE A RIGHT DOWN THAT HALL...
ばたばた
TMP TMP
?

DEMON DOCTORS CERTAINLY HAVE A LOT TO DO...
I'M SURPRISED YOU DID ALL THIS BY YOURSELF, ONEE-SAMA.
YOU'VE BEEN A BIG HELP, LILA!
じゃり♪ JURI
LILA ♫
IT'S GOOD TO WALK LIKE THIS OCCASIONALLY. YOU'LL GET OUT OF SHAPE IF YOU RIDE YOUR BROOM ALL THE TIME.
THAT'S TIRESOME TO RIDE IN ITS OWN RIGHT...
じゃり♪ JURI
LILA ♫

IF SHE SHUTS UP, SHE LOOKS LIKE A LOVELY BOOKWORM.
じー!!!
STARE
ずきゅん
BA-DUM
WHOA!
AAH, THAT STARTLED ME... WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?
パコン
THMP
WE'RE HERE ON AN ERRAND FOR AKINA-KUN. YOU SURE HAD YOUR NOSE DEEP IN THAT BOOK.
WELL, I HIT A BREAK IN MY WORK, AND I LIKE TO READ.
GOOD! THAT'S SPLENDID!
...OH? THIS IS THE ORIGINAL.
WHAT'S THIS? YOU KNOW ENGLISH?
ENOUGH TO READ, ANYWAY. SPEAKING AND LISTENING GETS PRETTY IFFY.

WHY'S THAT? DID YOU LIVE ABROAD?
NO, I'VE JUST STUDIED IT SINCE I WAS LITTLE.
I REALLY WANTED TO READ ORIGINAL PRINTINGS.
ポン POOF
ポン POOF
GOOD! THAT'S SPLENDID! HERE, THIS IS MY COLLECTION OF RARE BOOKS. READ TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT!
READING IS WONDERFUL!
どさ THUD
THANKS A LO—
OH?
AH!
どさ THUD
どさ THUD
どさ THUD
TOO MANY! THAT'S WAY TOO MANY!
LILA'S JUST THRILLED TO FIND A FELLOW BOOK LOVER.
THERE'S A LIMIT TO EVERYTHING... OH, I'VE NEVER READ THIS ONE.
IT LOOKS NEAT, TOO. THANKS.
BOOKS BECOME A PART OF YOU, AFTER ALL...
ぺら FLAP
GOOD AFTERNOON.
I BROUGHT A VISITOR.
カチャ CLACK
OH, HEY, MARIABELL.

DA-
...DA-
WELCOME. MAY I ASK WHO...
PARDON THE INTRUSION.
oh
OOH, JURI!
AND...LILA?
DADDY!
I'M SORRY, FATHER...
HAVE A SEAT.
I SWEAR, SOME DAUGHTER I HAVE...
IF YOU'RE ALIVE, THE LEAST YOU COULD DO IS CALL.
WELCOME.
BROKEN.
とん
TNK
YOU MENTIONED YOU WERE COMING TO JAPAN SOMETIME IN THE NEAR FUTURE, BUT I WASN'T EXPECTING YOU THIS SOON.
WHERE'S MOM?
SEEING THE SIGHTS.
I FIGURED I WOULD SEE YOU TWO FIRST.

MMM, SPEAKING ENGLISH MAKES ME NERVOUS...
WHY, THANK YOU.
YOU'RE TOO KIND.
SMILE
ニッコリ
YOU'RE WEL- WAIT, HUH ?!
JAPANESE ?!
JAPANESE!?
WHAT A LOVELY CUP OF TEA.
DAD'S A HUGE JAPANOPHILE.
THAT'S WHY HE LET ME COME TO JAPAN ALL BY MYSELF.
HOW LONG WILL YOU BE HERE?
JUST FOR THE ACADEMIC CONFERENCE, SO ABOUT A WEEK.
CONFERENCE?
HE'S A RESEARCH BIOLOGIST.
OH, THAT REMINDS ME.
PAP
ポン
AKINA-KUN ASKED IF I WOULD GIVE THE BOOK ABOUT THE SEVEN PILLARS IN THE ARCHIVE A READ.
AAH, THE ONE WRITTEN IN ENGLISH?
I TRIED READING IT, TOO, BUT I DIDN'T GET ANY OF IT.
IS THAT BOOKSHELF THE ARCHIVE?
HOW SHABBY...
JUST A SEC.
CAN YOU GIVE ME A HAND, JURI-SAN?
ガタ
RATTLE
ガタ
RATTLE

THERE WE GO.
がちょん
KA-THUNK
OH, MY!
IT'S LIKE A NINJA MANOR.
I HAVEN'T BEEN DOWN HERE IN A WHILE.
CLANG
ガシャ
SNAP
AAAH!
どさッ
FWUMP
KOTOHA-CHAN!
OW...
じーん
OW...

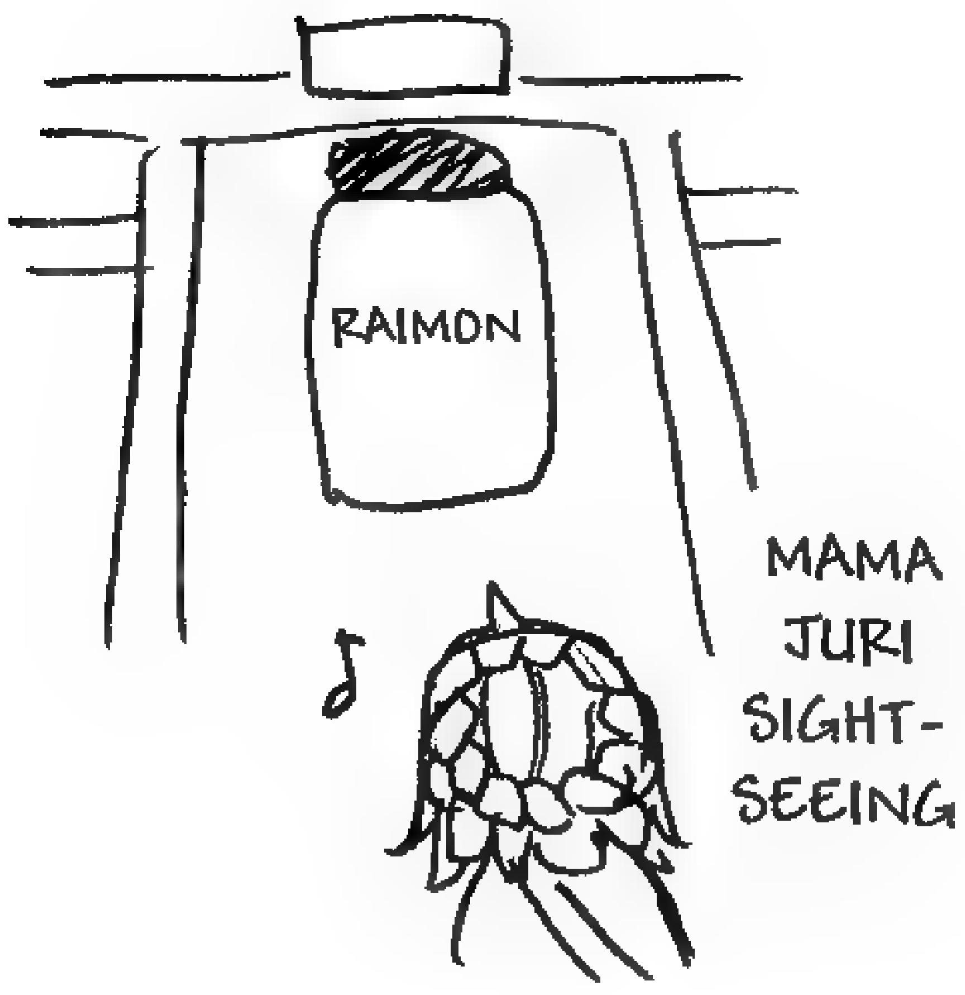
ARE YOU OKAY, KOTOHA-CHAN?!
I'M FINE.
I'LL FIX THE LADDER WITH *KOTODAMA* ON MY WAY UP.
IS THIS IT?
FOR NOW. CATCH.
ToSS
ぽん
AAH!
THIS IS THE BOOK?
IT'S MORE LIKE A RESEARCH LOG.
IT'S ALL SCRIBBLES.
AND I CAN'T MAKE HEADS OR TAILS OUT OF WHATEVER'S WRITTEN...
YOU'RE RIGHT. I DON'T UNDERSTAND A THING...
COULD THIS BE THE AUTHOR'S NAME?
HMM... I WONDER WHAT IT SAYS.
THIS IS...
INDEED.
YOU TWO CAN READ IT?
IT'S VERY QUIRKY HANDWRITING, SO I CAN'T BLAME YOU FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO.
VICTOR CALVANI FRANKENSTEIN.
THIS WAS WRITTEN BY MY FATHER.
JURI, LILA, HE'S YOUR GREAT-GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER.

WHAT?! THEN THIS BOOK IS FROM THE EDO PERIOD?!
HE'S THE ONE WHO BUILT THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAMILY'S BIOLOGICAL RESEARCH.
THERE'S A LOT OF JARGON AS WELL, SO IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR A LAYMAN TO READ.
CAN YOU READ IT, DADDY?
WHO DO YOU TAKE ME FOR?
THE SEVEN PILLARS... THOSE GIANT TREES, EH?
IT APPEARS TO BE A RECORD OF RESEARCHING THEM NOT AS "MATTER," BUT AS "ORGANISMS."
LET'S SEE...
パラ…
FLAP
ピカピカ
SQUEAKY CLEAN
どよ
TO
どよ
DO

HE WAS WHITE ALL ALONG!
GONG
I HAD NO IDEA...
THE ANALYSIS... IS STILL GOING, IT SEEMS.
JUST A LITTLE MORE.
WHAT'S UP?
OH, IT'S JUST... WE ALWAYS LOOK UP AT THE SEVEN PILLARS LIKE THIS, RIGHT?
I WONDER WHAT IT'S LIKE ON TOP.
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I DON'T KNOW, EITHER.
COULD WE TAKE A HELICOPTER ABOVE IT?
THIS WHOLE TOWN IS A NO-FLY ZONE.
YOU'VE NEVER SEEN A PLANE FLY OVER BEFORE, RIGHT?

HUH? REALLY?!
IT'S DANGEROUS TO FLY, AND SATELLITES CAN'T EVEN TAKE PICTURES.
THERE'S MAGNETIC INTERFERENCE, AFTER ALL.
WHAT ABOUT THE SENATE?
IT'S HARD TO ADMIT, BUT WE DON'T HAVE ANY DATA, EITHER.
THE SHAPE IS SUCH THAT SIMPLY CLIMBING TO THE TOP IS DIFFICULT, AND IT'S BEEN PUT OFF UNDER THE ASSUMPTION THAT THERE ISN'T ANYTHING UP THERE TO BEGIN WITH.
THERE'S STILL SO MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT THE SEVEN PILLARS.
...
NOW THAT THE SHAPE'S CHANGING, IT'S NO LONGER IMPOSSIBLE.
キュ
SQUEAK
ALRIGHTY.
WHY DON'T WE TRY GIVING IT A CLIMB?

YOZAKURA QUARTET
12


RAIMON
MAMA JURI SIGHT-SEEING

AND AFTER WAITING A NIGHT...
...WE JUST LEISURELY ASSESS THE SITUATION.
TMP
TMP
WELL, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO PUT THAT MUCH MORE EFFORT INTO INVESTIGATING.
WHICH OF THE PILLARS WAS HIME GOING TO FIRST AGAIN?
TMP
NUMBER SIX, THE ONE THAT SPLIT INTO TWO.
SHE WANTED TO TAKE A LOOK AT THAT ONE FIRST.
I CAN'T BLAME HER.
WE'VE LOOKED AT THE SEVEN PILLARS SINCE WE WERE KIDS.
WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT SOMETHING LIKE THAT'D HAPPEN?
WE SHOULD CHECK ALL OF THEM TODAY.
AT A GLANCE, THE SIXTH IS THE ONLY ONE THAT SEEMS TO BE ABNORMAL, BUT PERHAPS THEY'VE CHANGED BENEATH THE SURFACE.
SURE.

#64 STORY (PART TWO)

NOW, THEN.
HM.
IS IT OFF-CENTER?
DOESN'T SEEM TO BE.
I SEE.
NOT THAT I CAN REALLY TELL, MYSELF.
IT'S HARD TO SAY IF THE PILLARS ARE OFF...
...OR IF I'M THE ONE WHO'S SLIPPING.
DON'T JINX YOURSELF.
I'LL CIRCLE AROUND.
ブロロ…
VRUM
キッ
SCREE
HELLO.
OH! SHIINA-SAN, MARICCHI.
HEY THERE.

THUD
HERE'S FINE. I'LL SEARCH BY MYSELF NOW.
THANK YOU.
LOOKING FOR SOMEONE?
AN ACQUAINTANCE IS IN TOWN, BUT IT SEEMS HE'S WANDERED OFF SOMEWHERE...
HE'S A MAN FROM OVERSEAS.
HMM. CAN'T SAY I'VE SEEN HIM.
CAN'T REACH HIM BY PHONE?
FLIP
I'LL TRY CALLING AGAIN.
わや HUB
わや BUB
HUB わや
BUB わや
OH, IT'S THE LOCAL POSTER GIRL...
...AND A FOREIGNER?
HEEEY! INRAY!
AH! AKINA-SAN! HELP MEEE!
I DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH!
MY APOLOGIES. I WAS HOPING TO ASK FOR DIRECTIONS.
PHEW... I WAS SWEATING THERE FOR A MINUTE.
BUT R TO THE I-N...

...HE'S SPEAKING JAPANESE.
HWAH?! YOU'RE RIGHT!
JAPANESE!?
CHARMED.
IT'S BEEN TOO LONG.
OH!
YES, IT CERTAINLY HAS BEEN.
I WAS SO EXCITED TO COME TO JAPAN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SO LONG THAT I GOT THE URGE TO LOOK AROUND TOWN. MY APOLOGIES, GRANDMOTHER.
POUT
DON'T CALL ME GRANDMOTHER.
HA HA.
PARDON ME.
...HEY, AKINA-KUN.
HM?

TH-THIS IS ONE OF THAT MAN'S BOOKS.
COULD YOU... GET HIS AUTOGRAPH FOR ME?
AUTOGRAPH?
IS HE FAMOUS OR SOMETHING?
WHA-
ARE YOU STUPID?! HE PAVED THE WAY FOR MODERN BIOLOGY!
APOLOGIZE! APOLOGIZE TO HIM, THIS BOOK, AND HIS RESEARCH!
ぎち CHOKE
ぎち CHOKE
G-GIVE ME A BREAK!
OH, YES.
SHE'S A FAN OF YOURS.
IS SHE NOW?
ずきゅん BA-DUM
EEP!
IS THIS TRUCK THE SENATE'S?
THEIR WORK IN COMBINING ONMYODO AND SCIENCE HAS BECOME WELL KNOWN OVERSEAS.
TH-THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
THOUGH MY EXPERTISE LIES IN BIOLOGY.
AND A HERETICAL SORT OF RESEARCH, AT THAT.
YOU CERTAINLY HAVE STRANGE TASTES.
I STUDIED BIOLOGY WITH JURI IN COLLEGE...
I READ THIS BOOK SO MUCH, THE PAGES ARE WORN OUT.
じも FIDGET
じも FIDGET

I'M SURE YOU HAD YOUR REASONS FOR PURSUING THE PATH OF SCIENCE.
I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR EFFORTS.
THANK YOU! ♡
AND YOU'RE...
...A HIIZUMI, ARE YOU NOT?
YES. THAT'S RIGHT.
OH... WOULD YOU HAPPEN TO BE JURI-SAN'S...?
GOOD GUESS.
YOU DID CALL MARICCHI GRANDMOTHER, AFTER ALL.
さら SKRIT
さら SKRIT
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR JURI, SHE SHOULD BE AT MY OFFICE.
I SEE. THANK YOU.
SWIP すっ
...AN AUTOGRAPH?
WELL, THEN. SHALL WE, GRANDMOTHER?
WILL YOU SHOW ME THE WAY?
JEEZ!

IT'S HIS CONTACT INFO...
@ franken
SAY, BOY!
YOUNG HIIZUMI!
I HOPE WE MEET AGAIN!
IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME AT ANY TIME!
WHAT A SPRIGHTLY FELLOW.
HOW DID YOU KNOW HE WAS A HIIZUMI?
YOU BEGIN TO PICK UP ON THINGS AFTER BEING IN THIS FIELD FOR SO LONG.
AND NOT JUST BEING ABLE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN HUMANS AND DEMONS...
...BUT ALSO REGULAR HUMANS FROM NOT SO REGULAR ONES.
THOSE SORTS OF DIFFERENCES.

QUESTIONS, HUH?
SKF
I HAVE A TON, TO BE HONEST.
LIKE WHAT THE SEVEN PILLARS REALLY ARE.
OR MAYBE I ALREADY KNOW.
AND IF MY SUSPICIONS ARE RIGHT...
...THEN THINGS COULDN'T GET ANY CRUELER.
AKINA!
WELL?
LOOKS PERFECTLY NORMAL TO ME.
LET'S GET IN TOUCH WITH HIME.

MRRR...
MRRR-RR...
PIT
PAT
BING
BING
BING
WHAT HAS YOU GROANING, LILA?
I WANT TO DO MAGIC USING THE SEVEN PILLARS...
BING
...BUT I NEED SOME SORT OF GIMMICK.
GIMMICK?
YOUR MAGIC USES GIMMICKS?
I THOUGHT YOU SAID, "NO TRICKS, NO GIMMICKS"?
BING
OF COURSE IT DOES. I DON'T HAVE SPECIAL POWERS, AFTER ALL.
BING
I WANT TO TURN THIS WHOLE TOWN INTO MY STAGE.
BING
THAT'S WHY I'M ALWAYS PREPARING THINGS, DAY IN, DAY OUT.
BUNGA
BUNGA
SNAP
THAT'S HOW IT IS.
JUST DON'T SLACK OFF ON YOUR DOCTOR WORK!
YEP, YEP.

ばた ばた...
PITTER PATTER
SHIINA-SAN WENT TO TAKE A BATH.
MAYBE SHE WORKED UP A SWEAT CARRYING ALL THAT EQUIPMENT.
I GUESS SO. WAIT, WHAT ARE YOU WEARING, AO?
ごろ ROLL
YAE-SAN'S SOCKS!
ごろん ROLL
WHEEEW! SO SMOOTH!
FOR A GOD, SHE SURE SLEEPS A LOT...
MHM...
OH, SHE WOKE UP.
YAAAWN. MY LEGS FEEL KIND OF DRAFTY...
むっく SIT
ばば
FWAP

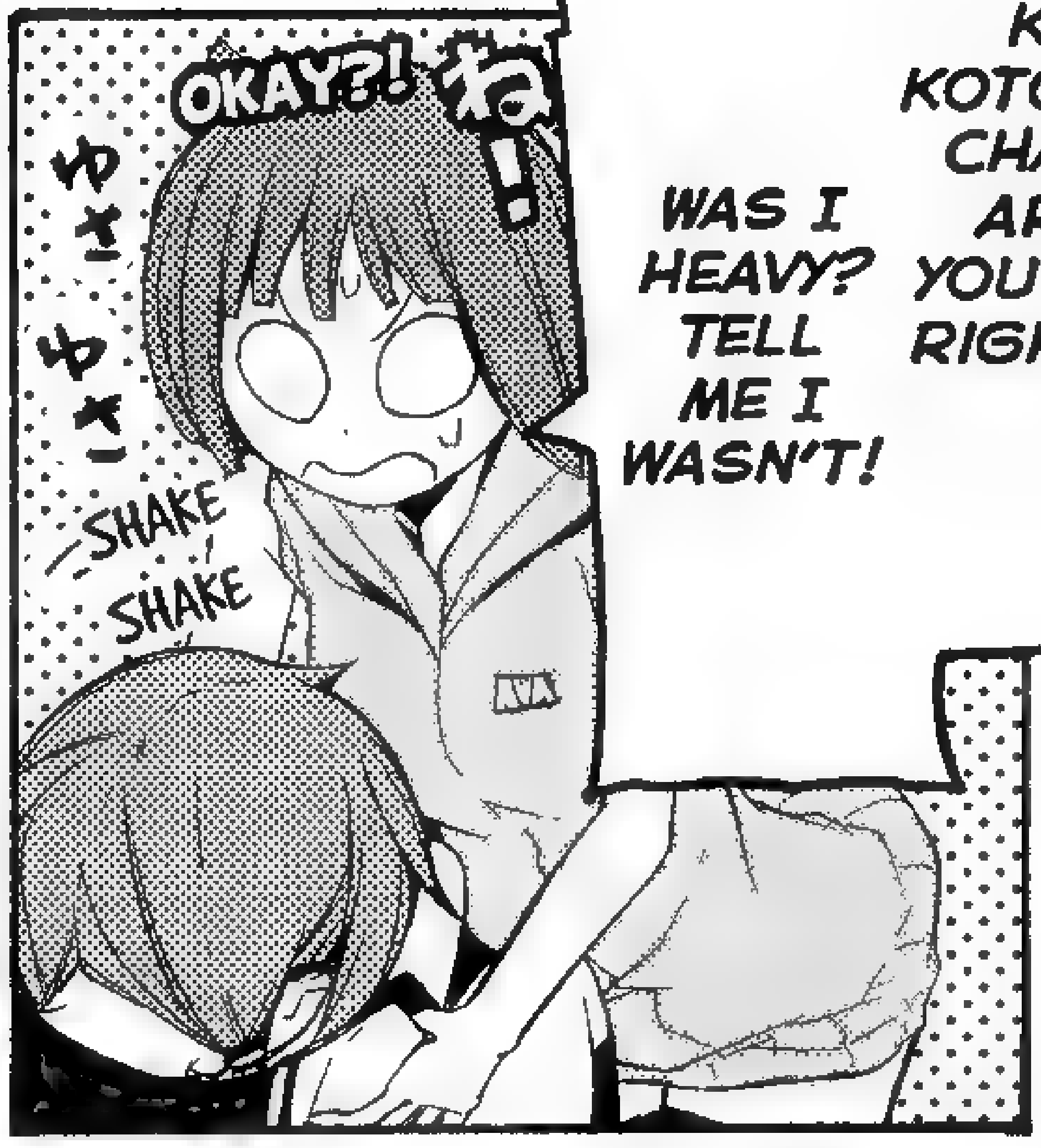
WH- WH- WH- WH- WH–
WHERE DID MY SOCKS GO...?
BUT YAE-SAN, YOU SHOW YOUR LEGS OFF ALL THE TIME, ANYWAY.
WHY NOW OF ALL TIMES?
もぞもぞ SQUIRM SQUIRM
I-IT'S DIFFERENT WHEN THEY'RE BARE!
H-H-H–
HOW EMBARRASSING...
バターン THUD
OOP!
SHE FAINTED.
SOME GOD...
AAAHN...
WE MADE A GOD FAINT.
AO, GIVE HER BACK HER SOCKS. I FEEL BAD FOR HER.
YEAH, I'LL DO THAT...

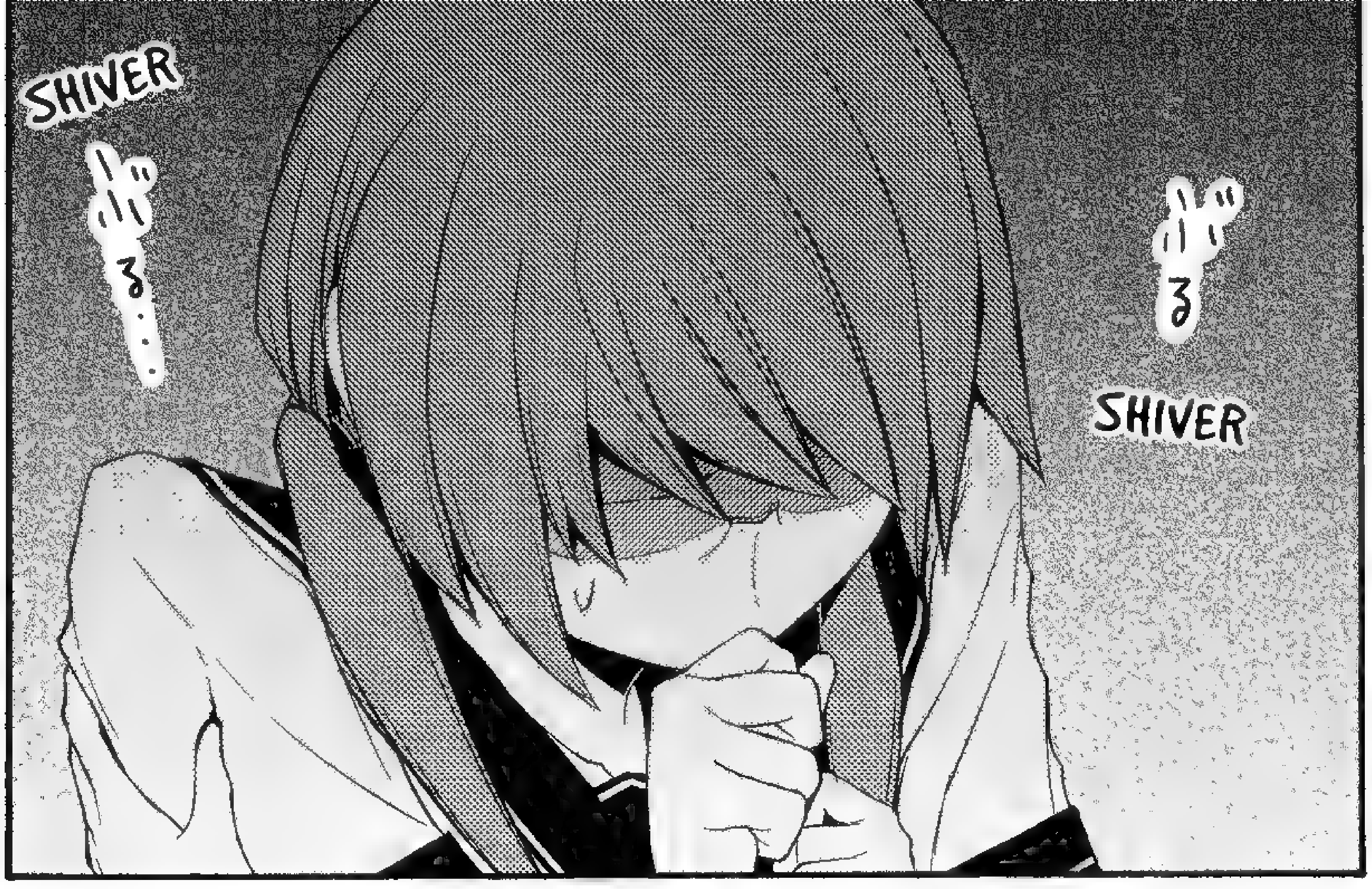
I WONDER WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF WE LEAVE JUST ONE OFF.
DON'T EXPERIMENT!
ぽん、
TOSS
WELL, THEN.
"PREFACE."

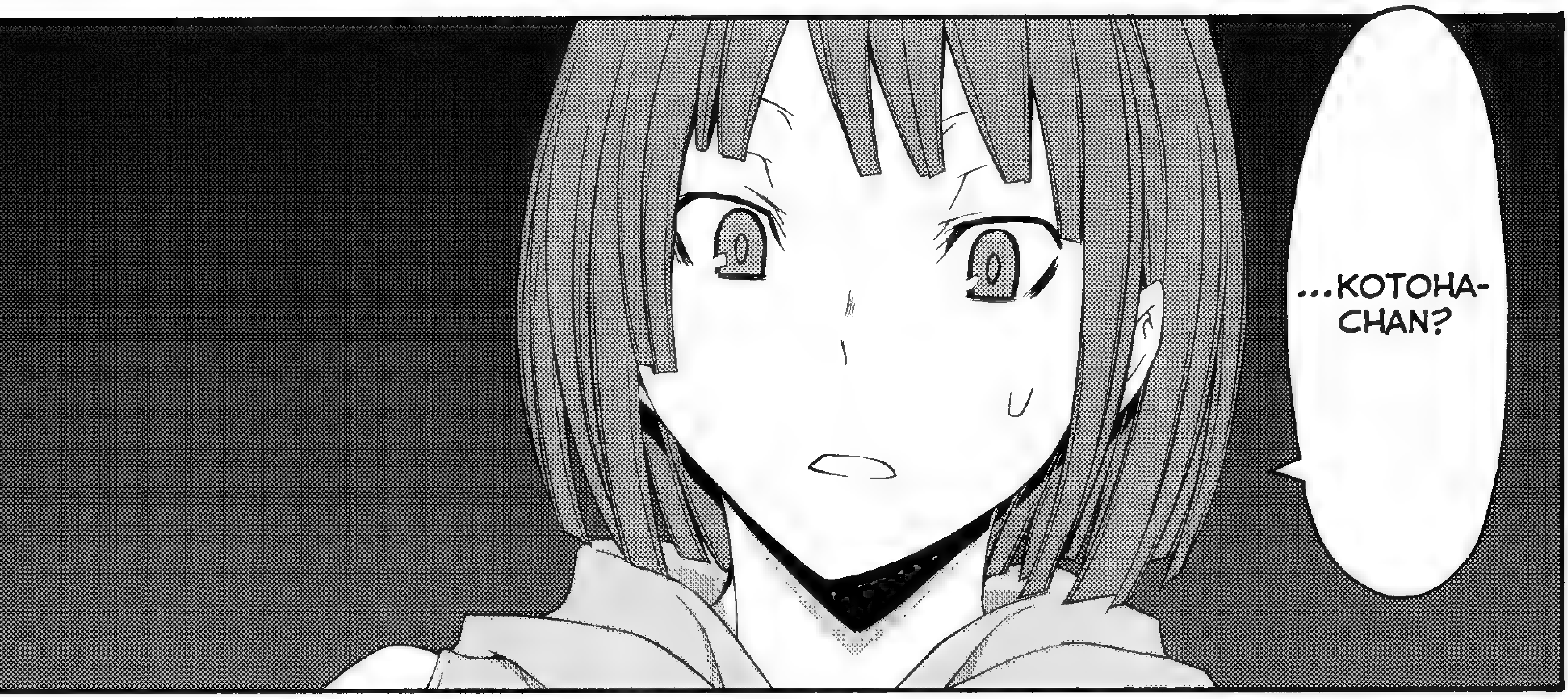
"WHEN THINKING OF THE SEVEN PILLARS AS ORGANISMS..."
"...WHAT BECOMES IMMEDIATELY UNCLEAR IS HOW THEY GENERATE ORGANIC ENERGY."
"THAT MECHANISM IS INDISPENSABLE TO ANY LIVING ORGANISM, YET THEY DO NOT POSSESS THE MEANS TO UNDERGO...
...PHOTOSYNTHESIS AS NORMAL PLANTS DO."
FSHH
FSHH
"THE NEXT ASSUMPTION WOULD BE THAT THEY ABSORB NUTRIENTS THROUGH THEIR ROOTS..."
"....YET THE SEVEN PILLARS' ROOTS DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE THAT FUNCTION."
"LEAVING THE IN-DEPTH EXPLANATION OF MY SURVEY RESULTS AND OWN ANALYSIS TO THE CONTENTS OF EACH CHAPTER..."
"...AFTER TAKING EVERYTHING INTO ACCOUNT, I WOULD LIKE TO DEFINE THE SEVEN PILLARS IN THIS PREFACE AS FOLLOWS."
"THE SEVEN PILLARS...
ARE ______."
HMM.
THE LETTERS ARE FADED.
I MAKE OUT "C-O-F-F"...

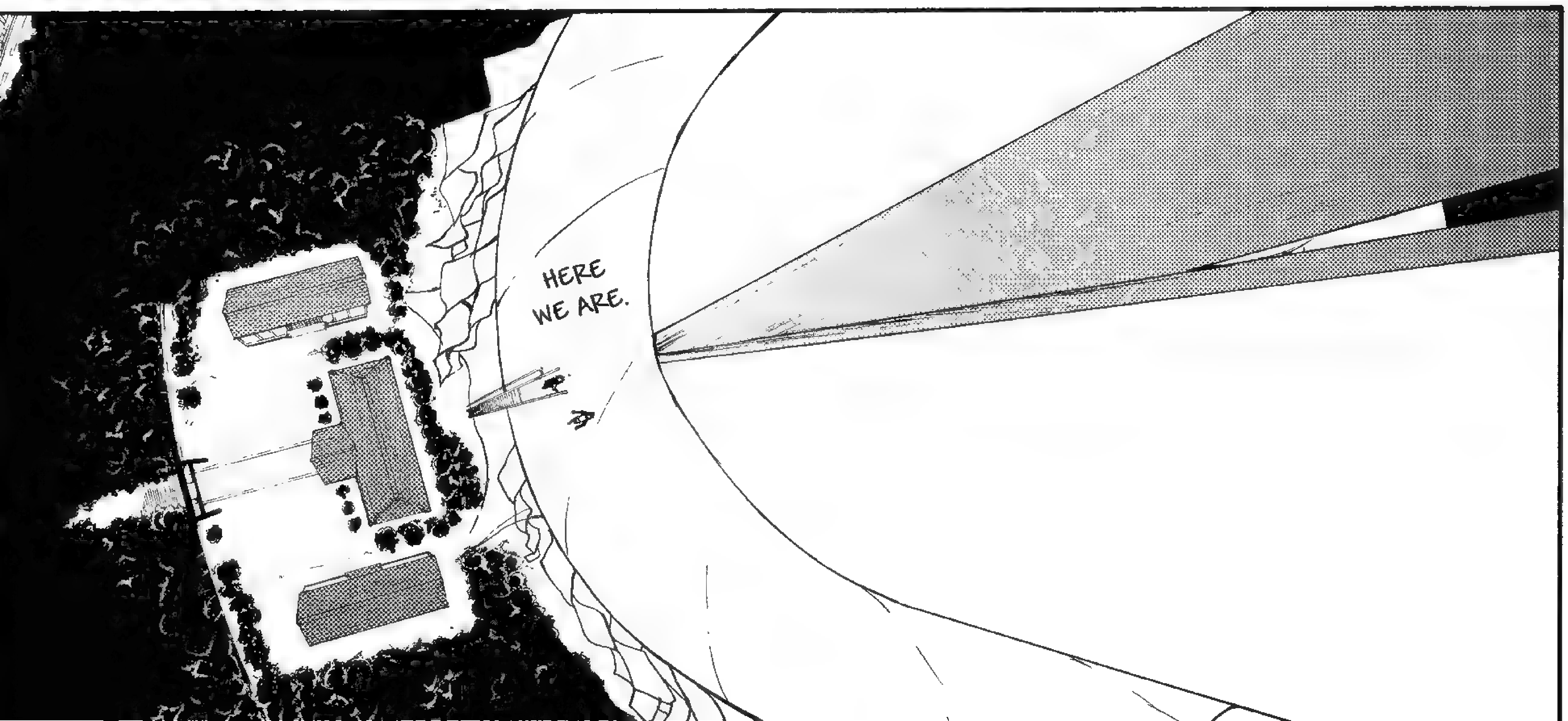
SWIF
すっ
"COFFEE."
MIGHT THAT BE IT?
とん
TAK
"THE SEVEN PILLARS ARE COFFEE..."
YOU MEAN THEY'RE COFFEE TREES?
WOULDN'T THAT BE SURPRISING?
WELL, THEIR SHAPE MAY BE CLOSER TO COFFEE TREES THAN TO SAKURA...
AT ANY RATE, WE SHOULD FIND OUT IF WE KEEP READING.
NOW THEN...
ばたばた
PIT PAT
HEL-LOOO!
ガチャ
CLACK
AKINA-SAAAN! I TRIED A GOOD STEW RECIPE I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT–

IT SEEMS SOMEONE'S HERE.
...
YES.
AND SOMETHING SMELLS GOOD...
OWW... JEEEEZ.
AH!


K-KOTOHA-CHAN! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
WAS I HEAVY? TELL ME I WASN'T!
OKAY?! ね!
ゆさ ゆさ
SHAKE SHAKE


ぶる
SHIVER
ぶる…
SHIVER


...KOTOHA-CHAN?


HERE WE ARE.

WELL, EVERYTHING CHECKS OUT UP TO THIS POINT.
I WASN'T SURE IF WE'D BE ABLE TO CLIMB SINCE IT'S AT AN ANGLE NOW...
HUP!
ぴょん BOING
I'M SLIPPING, HIME-CHAAAN!
ずり SLIDE
ずり SLIDE
FIGURES.
SHOULD WE NAIL SOME SCAFFOLDING IN AND TRY CLIMBING THAT WAY?
ずずず SLIIIDE
DAMAGING IT IS A NO-NO.
THEY'RE SACRED, AFTER ALL.
THEN WHAT SHOULD WE DO?
ぴょん BOING
ごろん ROLL
NO WORRIES. I CALLED IN A HELPER.
ANY TIME NOW...
ひょこ POP
HELLOOO.
THERE SHE IS.

ZAKURO SQUAD, REPORTING FOR DUTY!
UWAH!
わっせ
SHUFFLE
わっせ
SHUFFLE
YOU WAIT HERE, AO.
'KAAAY.
(にょき)
NRGL
(にょき)
NRGL
IT'S PRETTY SCARY, EVEN WITH A LIFELINE...
にょき
NRGL
にょき
NRGL
DON'T WORRY! I'LL PROTECT YOU.
ぐん
FWOOP
ぐん
FWOOP

BUT I WONDER WHAT MIGHT BE AT THE TOP OF THE PILLAR.
NRGL
NRGL
MMM... I DOUBT ANYTHING, BUT THERE'S NO HARM IN CHECKING.
AND IT MIGHT GIVE US THE SLIGHTEST CLUE AS TO WHAT THE SEVEN PILLARS REALLY ARE.
HOW DID THE SEVEN PILLARS COME TO BE AGAIN?
EVERYONE SEEMS TO AVOID THE SUBJECT...
WELL...THERE ARE TWO FAMILIES THAT MAKE UP THE HIIZUMI CLAN: AKINA'S HEAD FAMILY AND ENJIN'S BRANCH FAMILY.
HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO, THE HEAD FAMILY DECIDED TO SEND ENYOU HIIZUMI AND THE ENTIRE BRANCH FAMILY TO THE OTHER SIDE...
...WHICH RESULTED IN THE SEVEN PILLARS APPEARING ON THIS SIDE. ACCORDING TO ENJIN, THEY WERE SENT BY THE BRANCH FAMILY MEMBERS.
THERE ARE SEVEN OF THEM, BUT EXACTLY WHAT THEY ARE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MYSTERY.
I SEEEE. IT SOUNDS BOTH SIMPLE AND COMPLICATED AT THE SAME TIME.
HOW MANY PEOPLE TOTAL WERE SENT WITH ENYOU-SAN?
UMM. SEVEN.
SEVEN...
I HAVE TO SAY, ZAKURO, THESE GOLEMS ARE SOMETHING ELSE.

YOU CAN CONTROL THIS MANY AT ONCE... THAT'S A NECROMANCER FOR YOU.
FU FU FU... I CAN COMMAND EVEN MORE IF NEED BE.
JUST CALL ME COACH ZAKKURONI*.
I'LL PASS...
にょき NRGL
にょき NRGL
FU FU... FU.
スッ ZOOSH
ビクッ JERK
FWAH?!
WHAT'S WRONG?!
ZAKURO!
ZAKURO?!
AAH...
...?
...I'M ALL RIGHT. I CAN MAKE IT TO THE TOP.
I SENSE AN ILL PRESENCE...
LET'S HAVE SHIINA-SAN TAKE A LOOK AT YOU ONCE WE GET DOWN.
ガタン KA-THUNK
!
WE'RE HERE...
ひょこ POP

*A play on Alberto Zaccheroni, an Italian soccer manager.

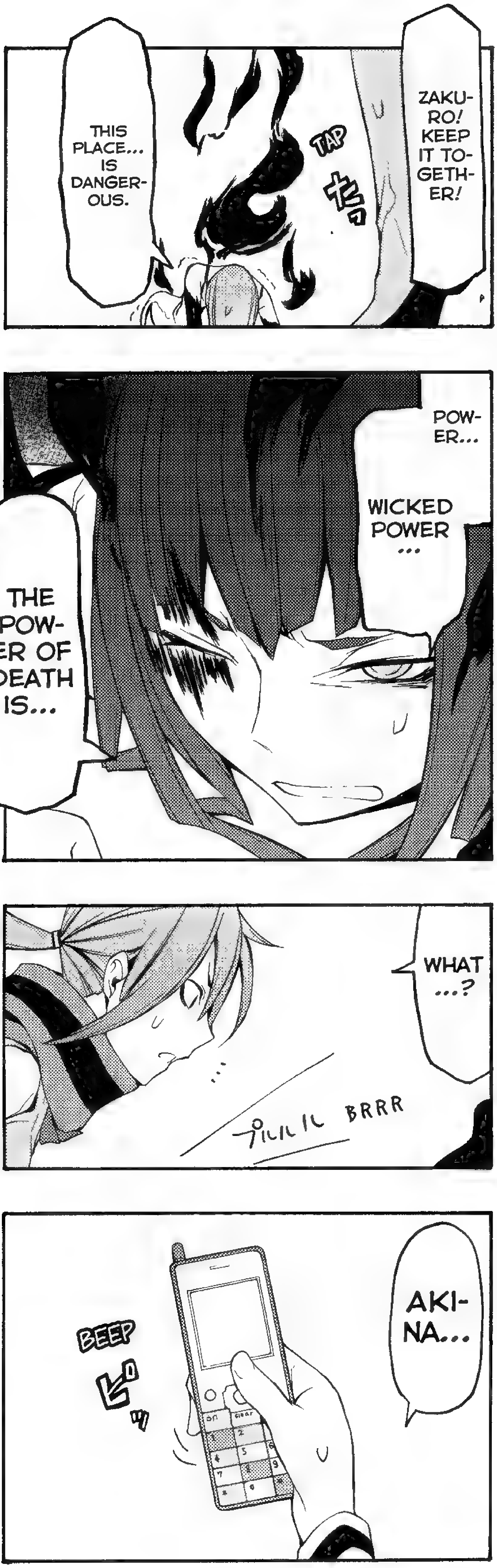
... FANCY MEETING YOU HERE.
ENJIN!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP HERE?!
... WHAT AM I DOING?
THAT'S A FINE GREETING.
!
HE'S HURT?
...OH, YOU KNOW.
WELL? NOW'S YOUR CHANCE.
YOU CAN STRIKE ME DOWN EFFORTLESSLY IF YOU'D LIKE.
...
EVEN IF I DEFEAT YOU, IT WON'T STOP THE BLOSSOMING!
SO NOT NOW. I'LL WAIT UNTIL AFTER WE STOP IT TO TAKE YOU DOWN!
INCLUDING SILVA, I'VE BUILT UP A LOT OF GRUDGES AGAINST YOU, AFTER ALL!
...I LOOK FORWARD TO IT.

THAT BEING SAID, THERE'S A LOT I WANT TO ASK YOU.
TELL ME EVERYTHING YOU—
SORRY, BUT I'M NOT A BIG TALKER.
WAIT!
YOU ASKED ME WHAT I WAS DOING UP HERE, RIGHT?
THAT MUCH I'LL TELL YOU.
と JUMP
VISITING A GRAVE.
SEE YA.
だ TAP
!
FWOOO
...
HE GOT AWAY...
むーん MRRR...

STILL, I DON'T SEE ANYTHING.
I GUESS WE CAME UP HERE FOR NOTHING.
ヒュゥウウウ
FWOOOO
WHAT'S THIS?
A LID?
どさっ
FWUMP

ZAKURO!

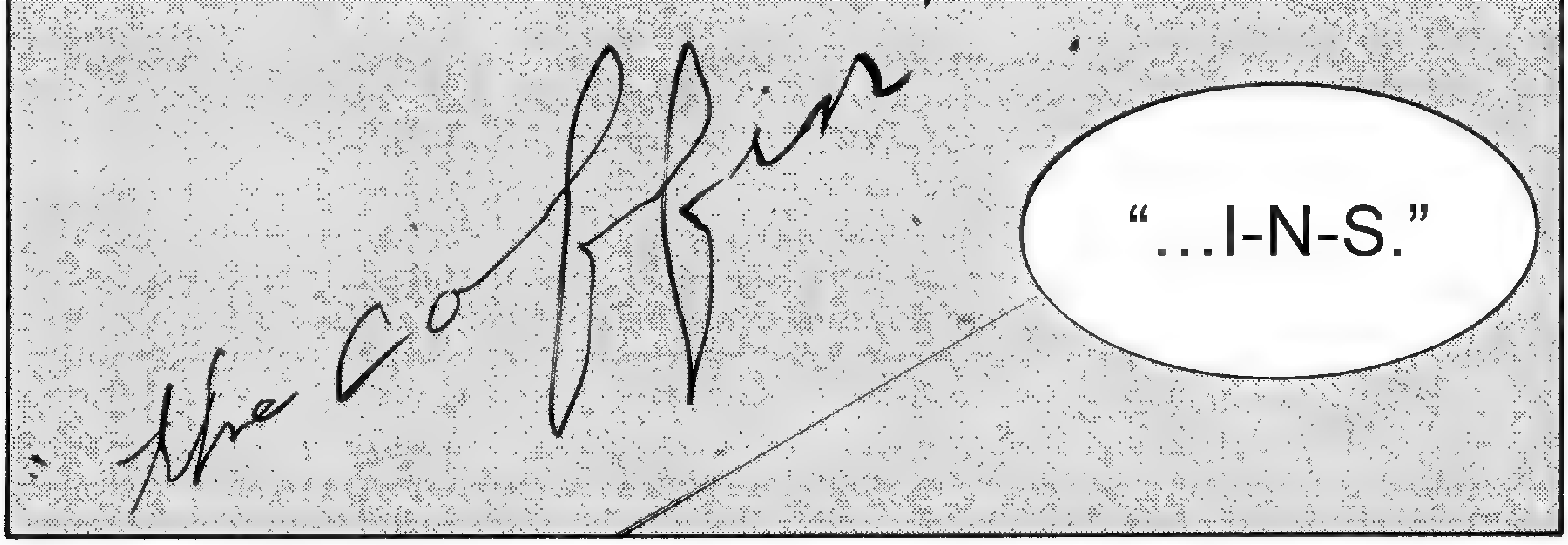

ZAKURO! KEEP IT TOGETHER!
TAP
たっ
THIS PLACE... IS DANGEROUS.
POWER...
WICKED POWER...
THE POWER OF DEATH IS...
WHAT...?
プルルル
BRRR
AKINA...
BEEP
ピッ

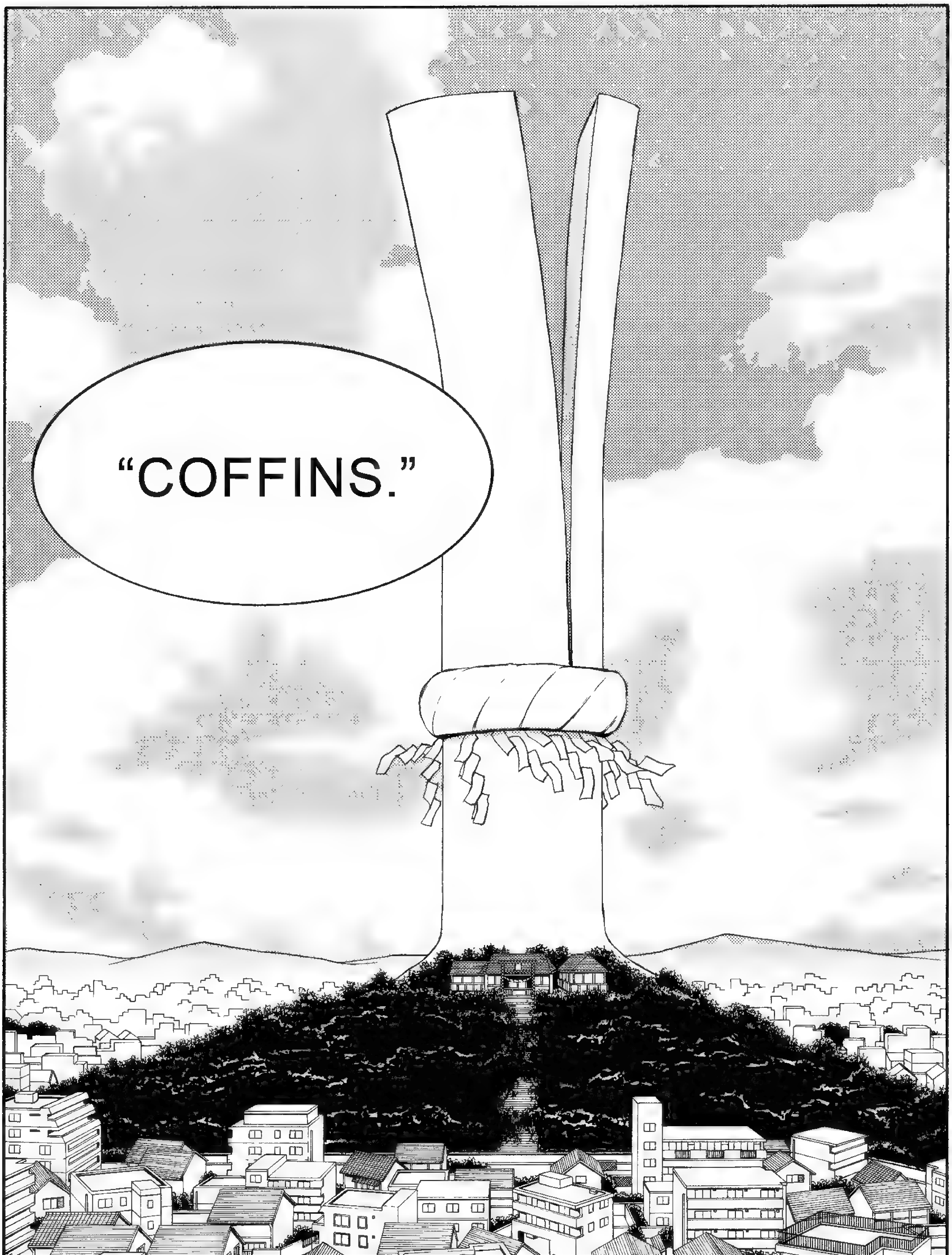
HELLO?
AO CALLED ME. SHE SAID YOU CLIMBED THE PILLAR.
I CAN JUST BARELY SEE YOU FROM HERE.
DID YOU FIND ANYTHING? SOMETHING THAT'LL GIVE US A LEAD.
A LEAD...
I FOUND SOMETHING THAT LOOKS LIKE A LID.
THEN ZAKURO'S NECROMANCY WENT OUT OF WHACK, AND I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S GOING ON!
...!
THEN I GUESS I WAS...
HIME...
!
WAIT!
THERE'S SOMETHING WRITTEN ON THE LID.
UMM...
"ENJOU...
"HII...
ZUMI..."

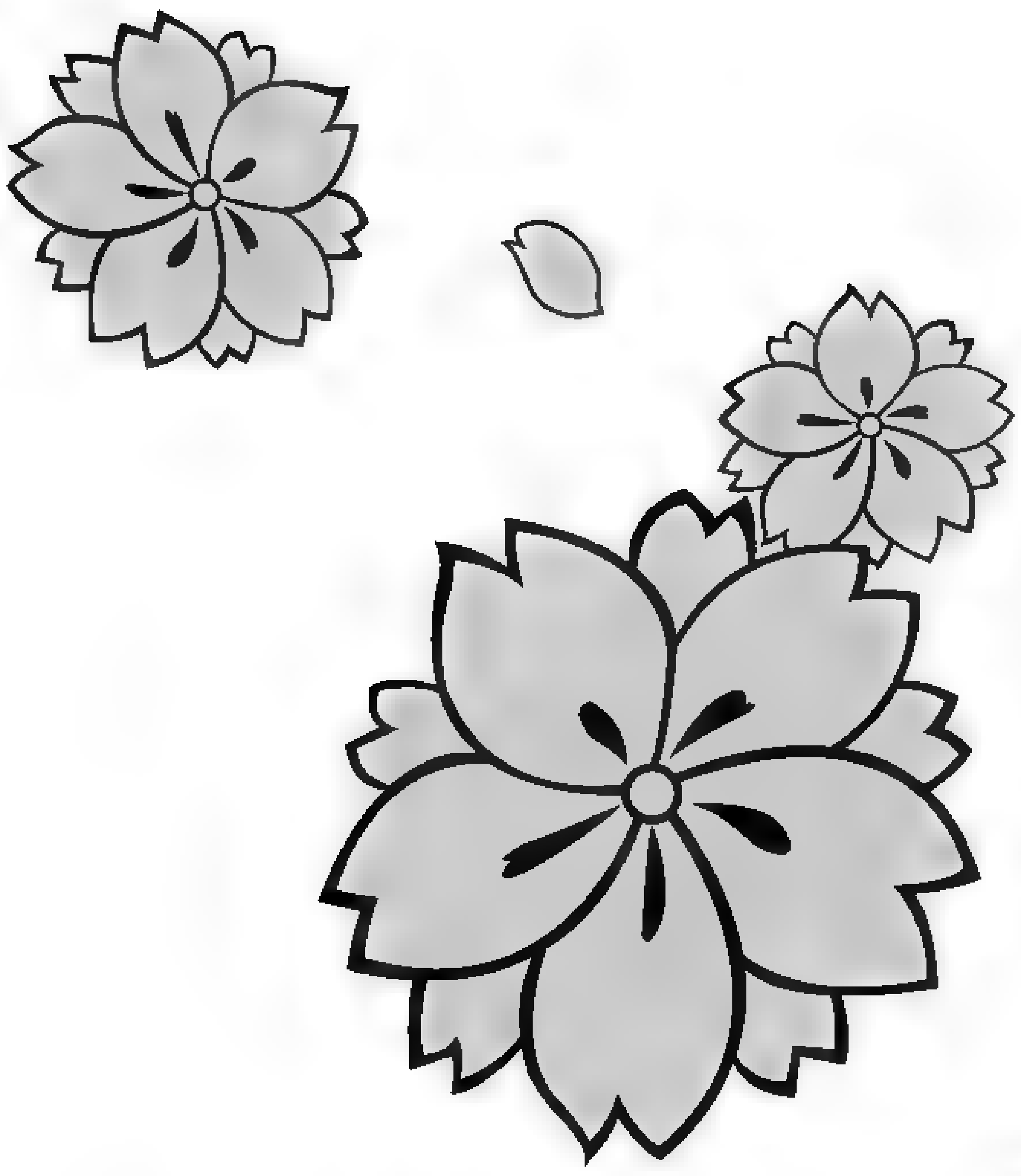
"ENJOU HIIZUMI."
ISN'T THAT...?

...
THE NAME OF ONE OF THE ENYOU'S FAMILY MEMBERS ...
HIME!
THEN ...
HUH ...?
HIME!

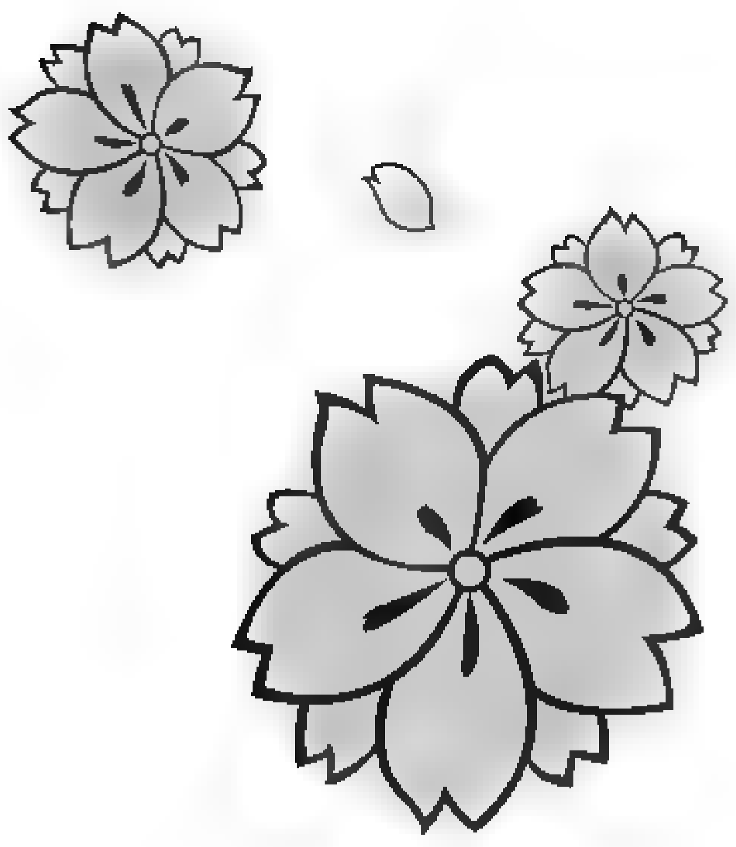
OH, GOD...
I'M SORRY, AKINA.
I CAN'T...
I'M SORRY.
I CAN'T OPEN THIS...
"AS THE RESULT OF MY ANALYSIS..."
"...I BELIEVE THE MECHANISM OR OBJECT PROVIDING THE PILLARS WITH ENERGY TO BE LOCATED WITHIN THE BODIES OF THE SEVEN PILLARS THEMSELVES."
"WITH THE AFOREMENTIONED IN MIND, I'D LIKE TO DEFINE THE SEVEN PILLARS AS FOLLOWS."
"THE SEVEN PILLARS ARE GIGANTIC..."
"...C-O-F-F...?


"…I-N-S."
the coffin

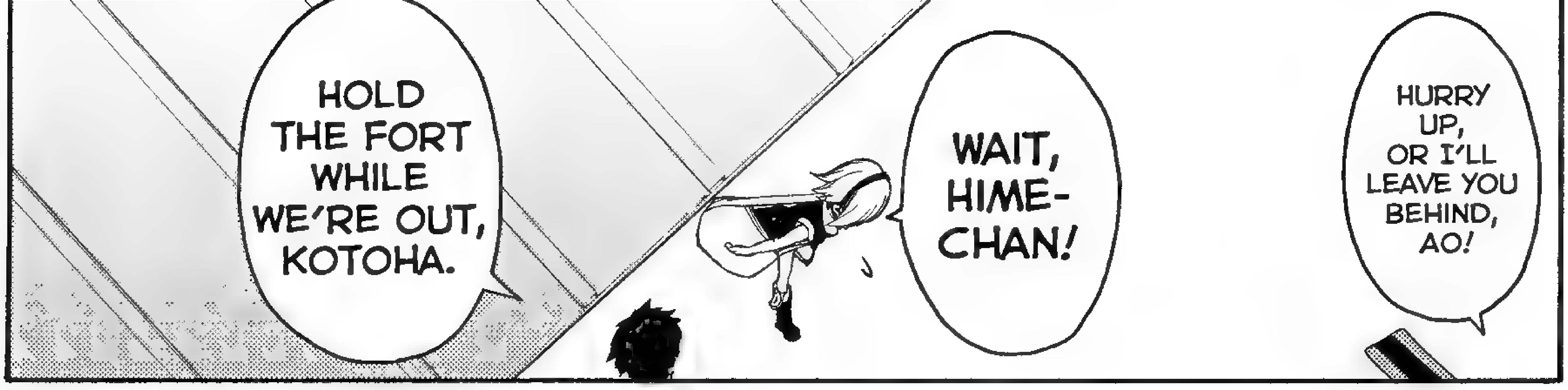

"COFFINS."

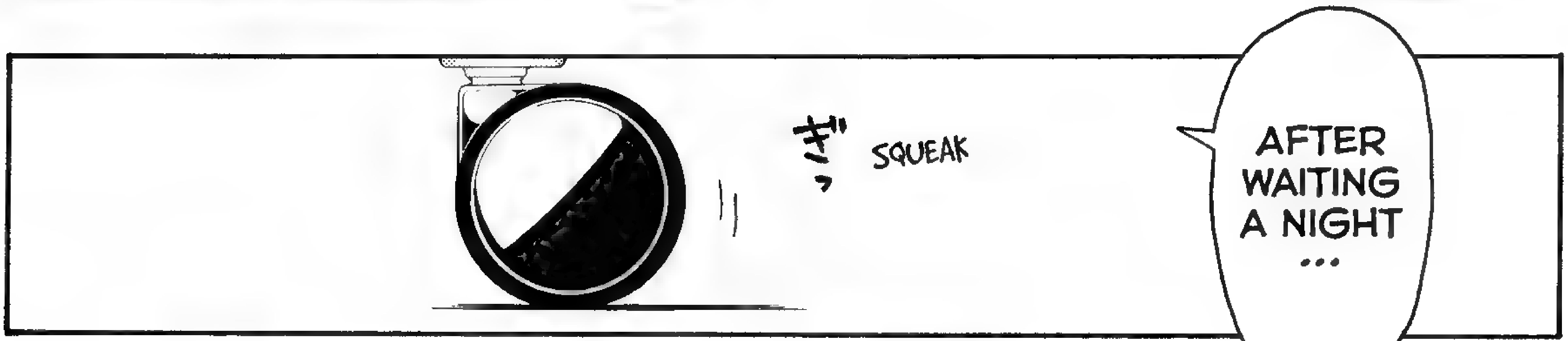


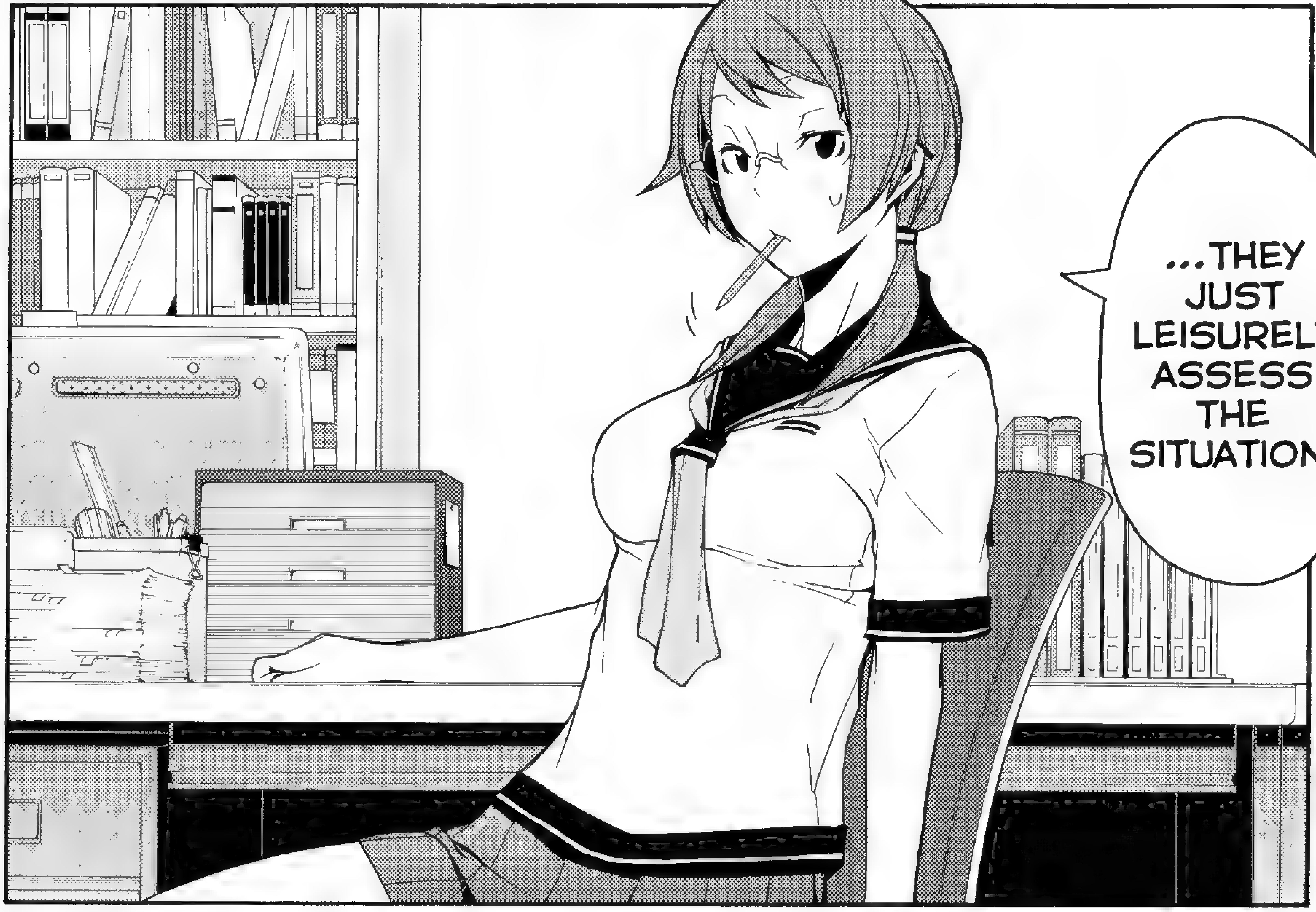
YOZAKURA QUARTET 12

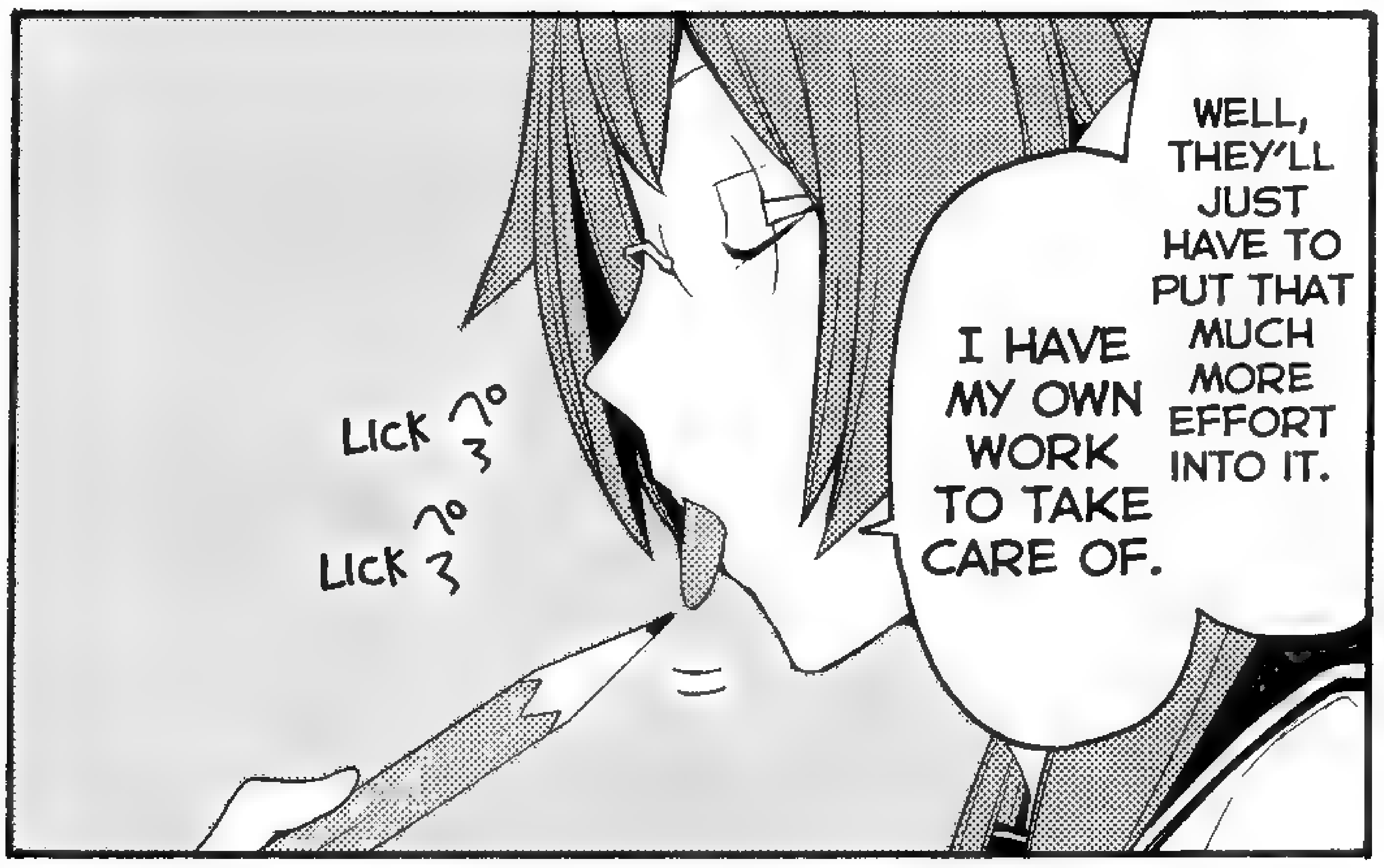


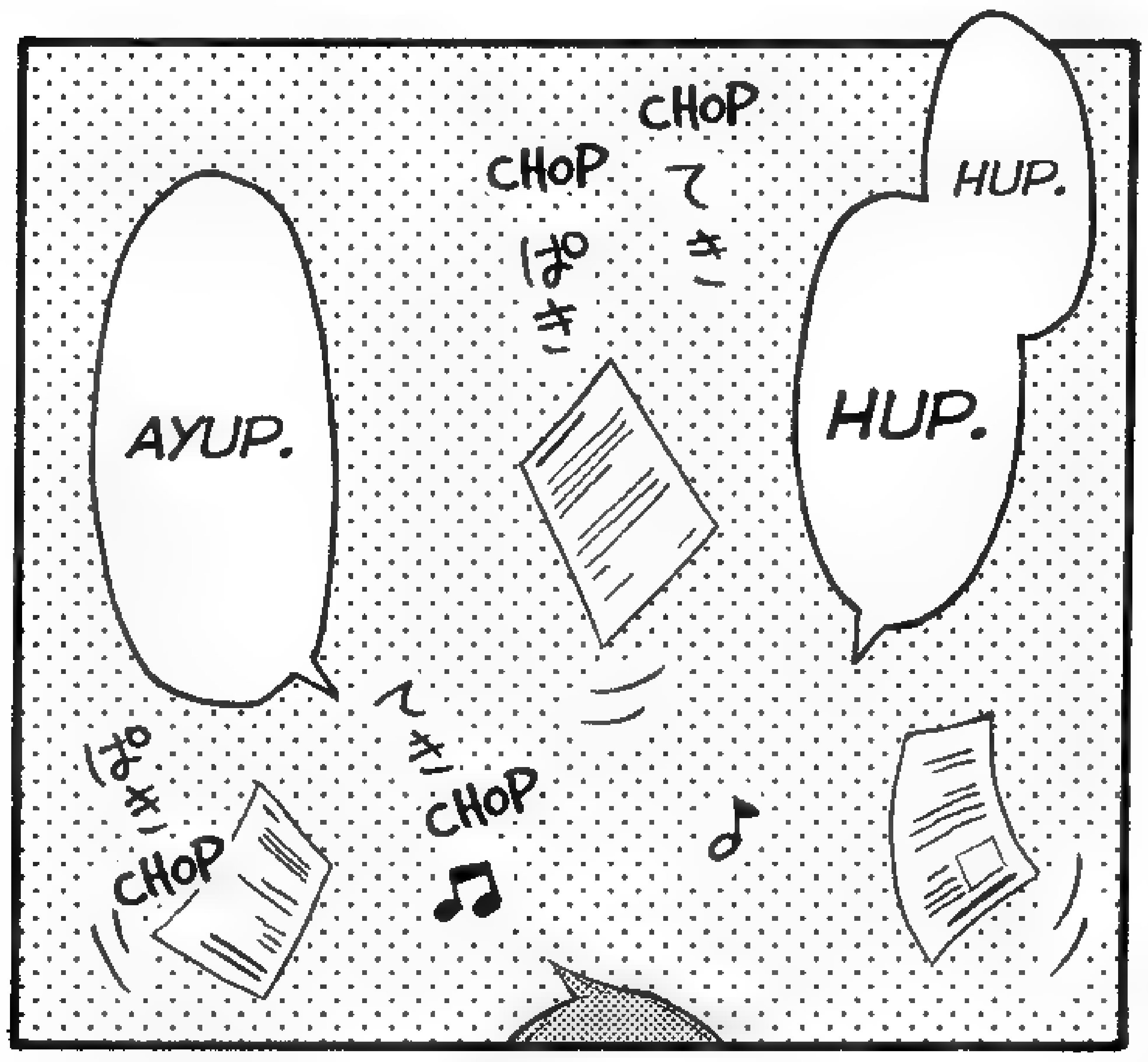
YOZAKURA
QUARTET 12


HURRY UP, OR I'LL LEAVE YOU BEHIND, AO!
WAIT, HIME-CHAN!
HOLD THE FORT WHILE WE'RE OUT, KOTOHA.


AFTER WAITING A NIGHT...
ぎ
SQUEAK


...THEY JUST LEISURELY ASSESS THE SITUATION.


WELL, THEY'LL JUST HAVE TO PUT THAT MUCH MORE EFFORT INTO IT.
I HAVE MY OWN WORK TO TAKE CARE OF.
ぺろ
LICK
ぺろ
LICK


HUP.
HUP.
CHOP
てき
CHOP
ぱき
AYUP.
てき
CHOP
ぱき
CHOP

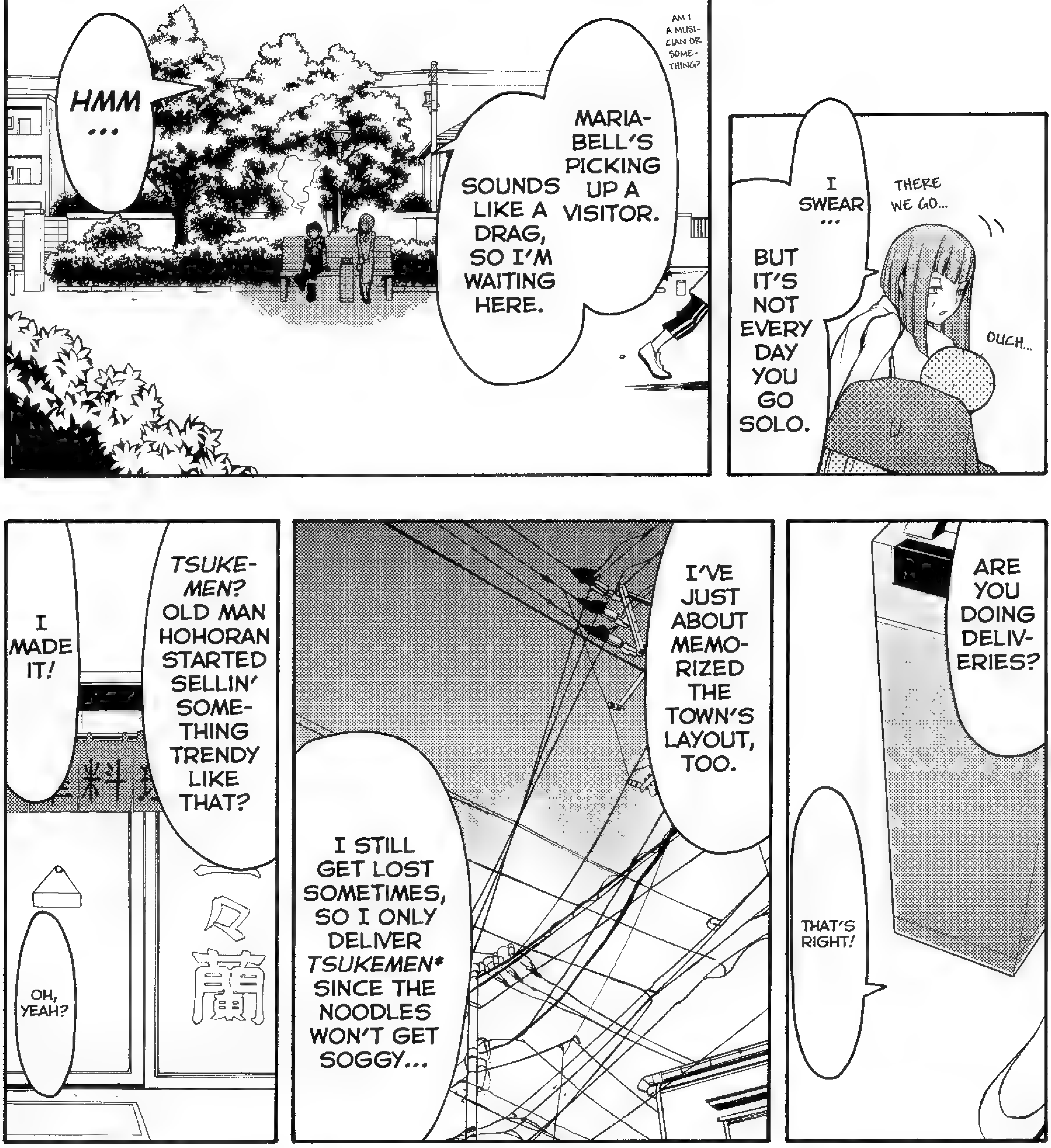
65TH NIGHT STORY (PART THREE)

ALL DONE.
泉生活相談事務所

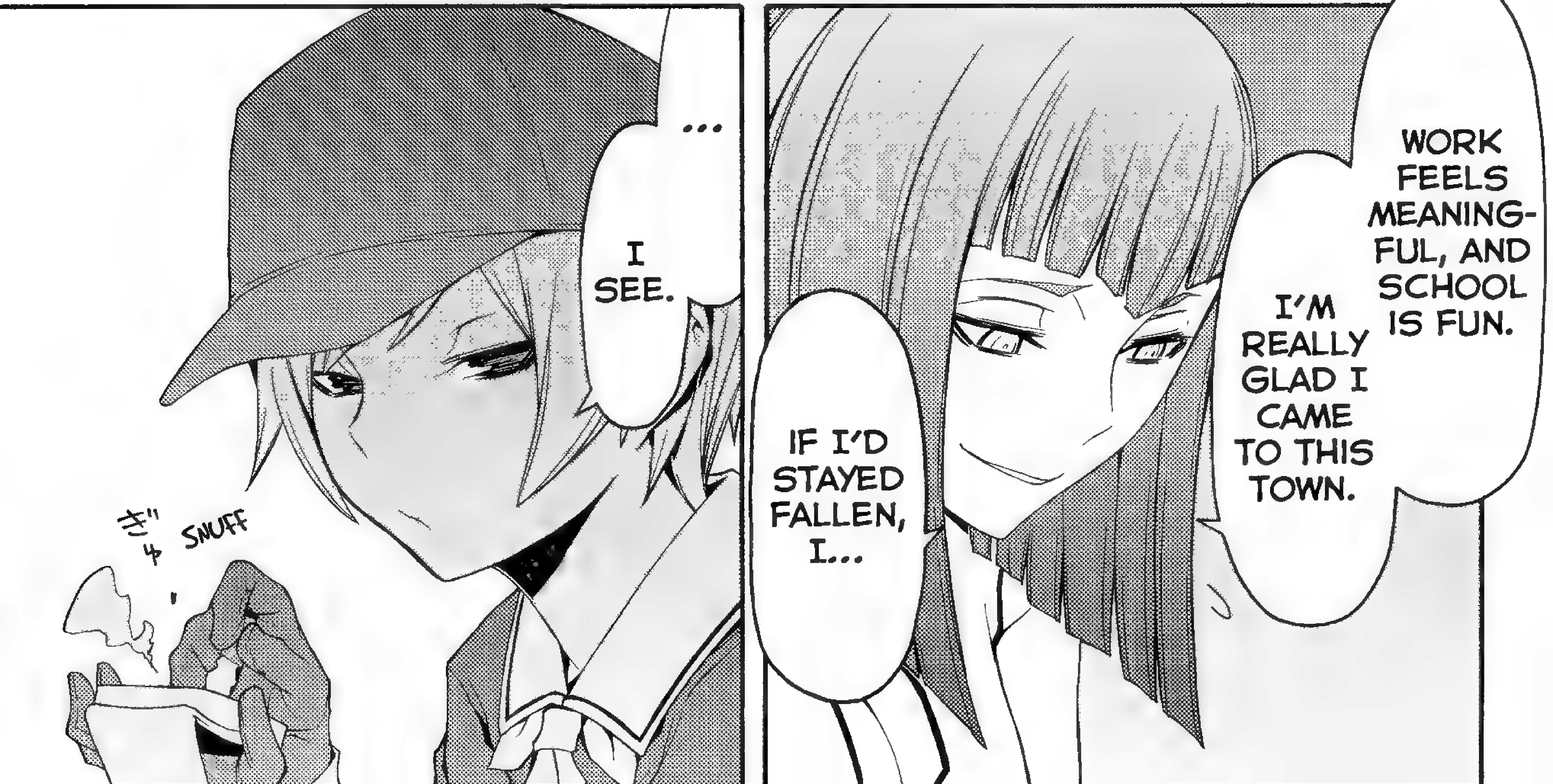
Sign: Hiizumi Life Counseling Office

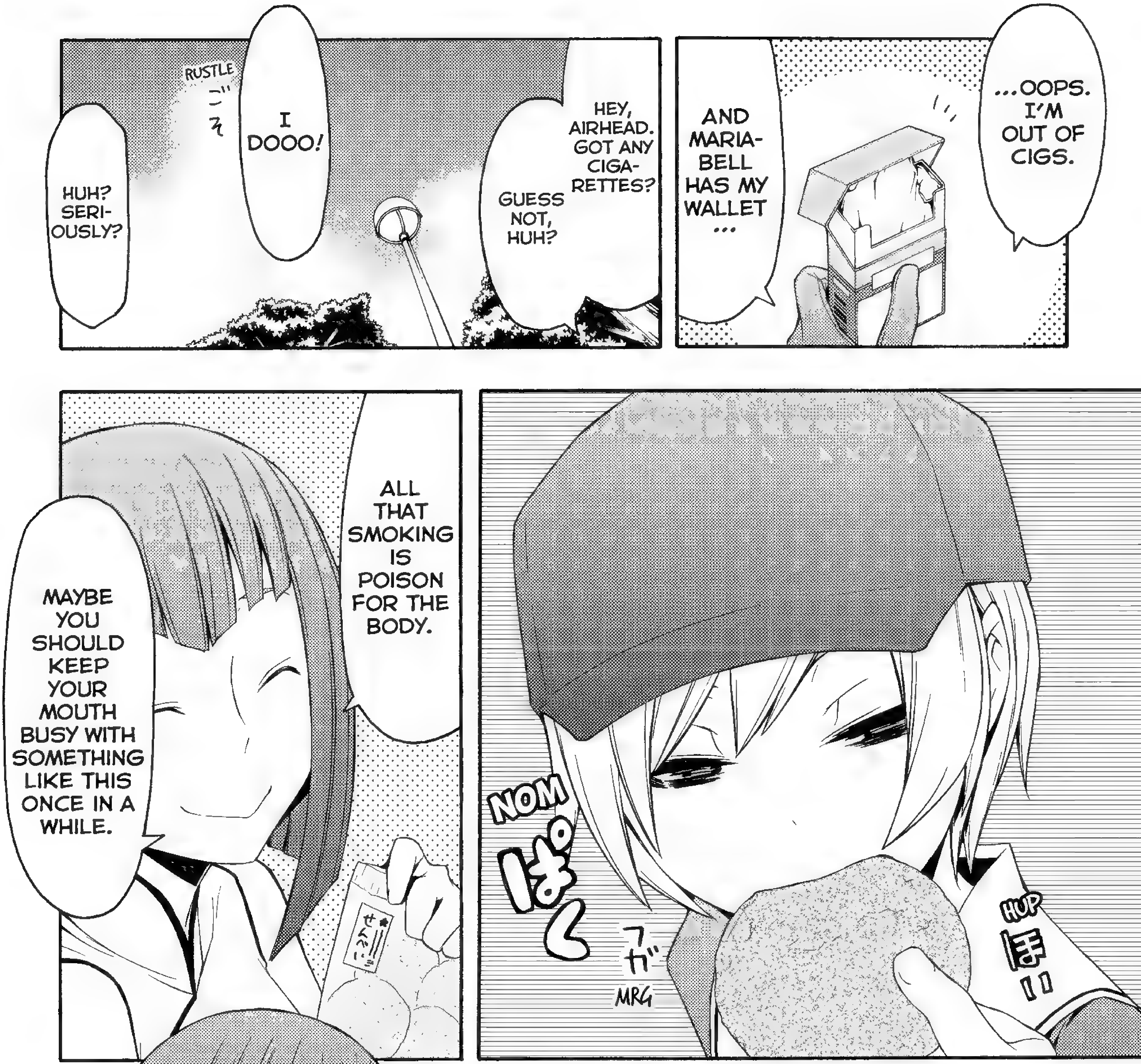
THAT BEING SAID...
パイん
SNAP
...A CAPABLE, ADORABLE *KODAMA* USER LIKE ME CAN FINISH THIS KIND OF WORK IN A JIFFY.
んーい
HNNN
WELL, I GUESS *KODAMA* DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH IT.
IT'D BE GREAT IF THERE WAS WORK I COULD PUT MY *KODAMA* POWERS TO USE ON.
WEEKLY CLEANING DUTY
AKINA
KOTOHA
AO
THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE RIGHT JOB, AS THE SAYING GOES.
OR SO I SAY, BUT...
SHORT-CUT.
ぽんっ
POP
LILA BROOM.
THIS POWER IS CONVENIENT, BUT I CAN'T GO USING IT ALL WILLY-NILLY.
IT'S HALF-DEMON POWER, AFTER ALL.
シャッシャー
SKSH
SKSH
I'LL JUST GET CALLED AN AIRHEAD IF I USE IT EVERYWHERE.

HEEEY! AIRHEAD!
ME?
HEY, THERE.
YOU'RE LOOKING WELL.
MY NAME IS ZAKURO, NOT AIRHEAD.
YEAH, I KNOW.
I JUST SAID THAT SINCE YOU'RE SO DEFENSELESS.
HIDE YOUR CHEST MORE.
KYAAAH! HE TOUCHED THEM AGAIN!
ぬ
MOOSH

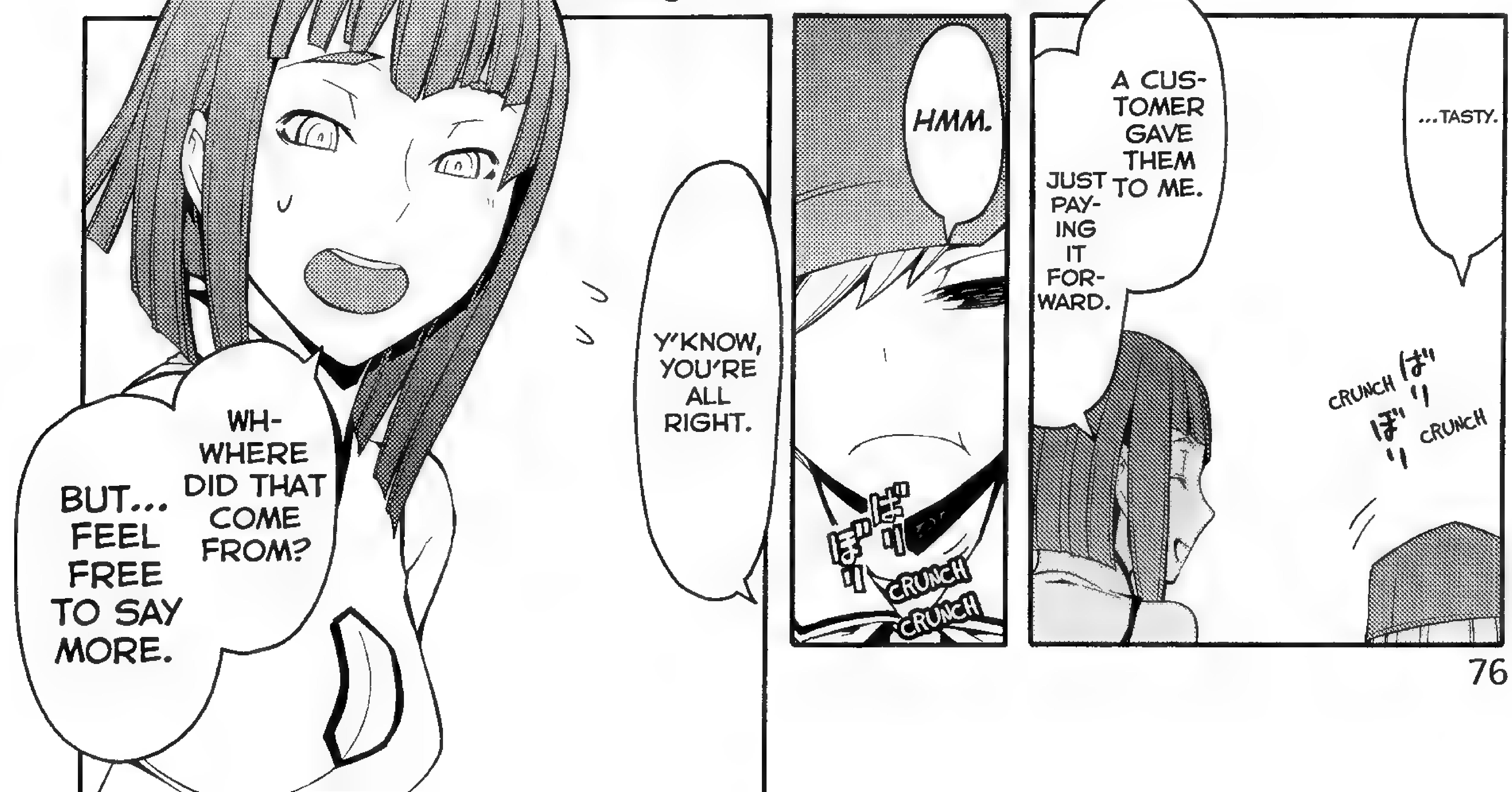

MARIA-BELL'S PICKING UP A VISITOR.
SOUNDS LIKE A DRAG, SO I'M WAITING HERE.
HMM...
I SWEAR...
BUT IT'S NOT EVERY DAY YOU GO SOLO.
AM I A MUSICIAN OR SOMETHING?
THERE WE GO...
OUCH...
ARE YOU DOING DELIVERIES?
THAT'S RIGHT!
I'VE JUST ABOUT MEMORIZED THE TOWN'S LAYOUT, TOO.
I STILL GET LOST SOMETIMES, SO I ONLY DELIVER *TSUKEMEN** SINCE THE NOODLES WON'T GET SOGGY...
TSUKEMEN? OLD MAN HOHORAN STARTED SELLIN' SOMETHING TRENDY LIKE THAT?
OH, YEAH?
I MADE IT!

*A type of ramen in which the noodles and soup are seperate.


WORK FEELS MEANINGFUL, AND SCHOOL IS FUN.
I'M REALLY GLAD I CAME TO THIS TOWN.
IF I'D STAYED FALLEN, I...
... I SEE.
ぎゅ SNUFF


...OOPS. I'M OUT OF CIGS.
AND MARIABELL HAS MY WALLET...
HEY, AIRHEAD. GOT ANY CIGARETTES?
GUESS NOT, HUH?
I DOOO!
RUSTLE ごそ
HUH? SERIOUSLY?
HUP ほい
NOM ぱく
ガ MRG
ALL THAT SMOKING IS POISON FOR THE BODY.
MAYBE YOU SHOULD KEEP YOUR MOUTH BUSY WITH SOMETHING LIKE THIS ONCE IN A WHILE.
せんべい

Package: Senbei Rice Crackers


...TASTY.
CRUNCH ばり
ぼり CRUNCH
A CUSTOMER GAVE THEM TO ME.
JUST PAYING IT FORWARD.
HMM.
ばり ぼり CRUNCH CRUNCH
Y'KNOW, YOU'RE ALL RIGHT.
WH-WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?
BUT... FEEL FREE TO SAY MORE.

I MEAN, I'M ALWAYS FEELING YOU UP WHENEVER WE MEET.
ばり
ぼり
CRUNCH
CRUNCH
WELL, I CAN'T SAY I APPRECIATE THAT...
BUT I RECEIVED SUCH DELICIOUS CRACKERS, AFTER ALL.
TASTY THINGS SHOULD BE SHARED WITH OTHERS.
THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE I WANT TO SHARE WITH IN THIS TOWN, I'M NOT SURE WHAT TO DO!
...TALK ABOUT A TRANSFORMATION.
ばり
CRUNCH
ぼり
CRUNCH
HMM...
STILL, TRY NOT TO LET YOUR GUARD DOWN SO MUCH.
GROPE
ぐに
GYAAAH!
THAT DOES IT FOR CLEANING!

...MMM.
ふわ
FLOAT
OOOH!
LILA-SAN'S BROOM IS PRETTY TRICKY TO RIDE.
ぷか
WAFT
ぷか
WAFT
THE WHOLE TRICK BEHIND IT IS BEING COPIED, SO I'M NOT SURE HOW THE GIMMICK WORKS.
LILA-SAN WON'T TELL ME, EITHER...
ぷか
WAFT
MRR...
MRRR...
WAFT
ぷか
ゆら
WOBBLE
MRRRR...
ゆら
WOBBLE

...I GIVE UP.
THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TODAY.
こてん
SLUMP
MY BODY CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE.
KNOWING THINGS ON A SURFACE LEVEL ISN'T ENOUGH FOR *KOTODAMA.*
I HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THEM MORE IN-DEPTH.
ALSO, I NEED A CUSHION...
ピー
FWEEE
ちょん
TNK
NOW, THEN...
ONTO MY LONG-AWAITED READING TIME...
I WONDER IF I'LL BE ABLE TO FINISH THIS ONE TODAY.
♪
BOOKS ARE GREAT.
YES, BOOKS ARE A WONDERFUL THING.

I READ BOOKS EVEN MORE WHEN I WAS LITTLE.
I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE CALLED ME A BOOKWORM...
...BUT WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT NOW, THEY WERE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.
I'D PREFER SOMETHING LIKE "LITERATURE LADY," BUT I GUESS I WAS STILL JUST A KID.
WHEN READING BOOKS, IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO JUST FOLLOW THE TRAIL OF WORDS.
THAT ONLY RESULTS IN SURFACE-LEVEL KNOWLEDGE.
WHAT'S IMPORTANT IS TO "READ BETWEEN THE LINES."
I WAS TAUGHT THAT, IN DOING SO, YOU MAKE BOOKS A PART OF YOU.
AS A CHILD, I HAD A HABIT OF READING BETWEEN THE LINES A BIT TOO MUCH.
I'D FALL DEEPER, DEEPER...
...AND EVEN DEEPER,
UNTIL THE CHARACTERS PORTRAYED BECAME MY FRIENDS.

EVEN FOR A SHY GIRL LIKE ME WHO DIDN'T HAVE MANY FRIENDS...
...WHENEVER I READ, I NEVER ONCE FELT LONELY.
AREN'T YOU JUST BLUFFING?
IT'S TRUE.
EVEN AFTER I FELL, WAS EXORCISED, AND BECAME A HALF-DEMON,
MY PREFERENCE IN HOBBIES DIDN'T CHANGE.
THAT'S WHY I STILL LOVE BOOKS.
MUMBLE
MUMBLE
THOUGH THERE IS JUST ONE PROBLEM.
MUMBLE
MUMBLE

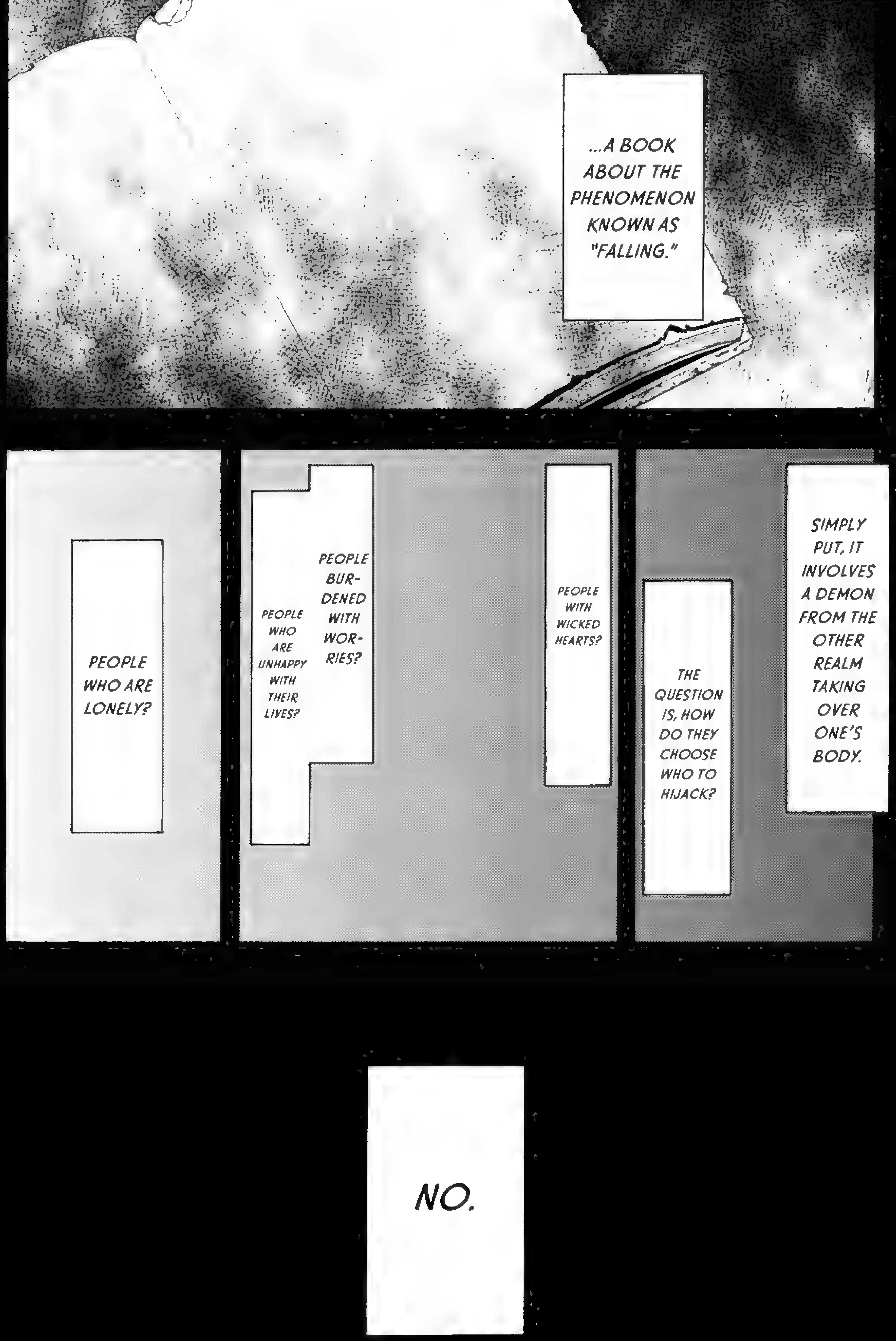
PROBLEM?
UH-HUH.
IF I'M NOT CAREFUL, I'LL SUMMON CHARACTERS WITH *KOTODAMA.*
HMM.
DON'T GIVE ME THAT! BACK YOU GO!
ぺろ ぺろ
LICK LICK
けし けし
ERASE ERASE
AWW.
THIS IS A GOOD PART, SO DON'T...
BACK TO READING.
STARE
じー...

WHOA! THAT STARTLED ME!
UM... MISS SENATOR?
SHIINA!
どた THUD
どた THUD
どた THUD
UM, SHIINA-SAN...
THIS KOTOHA-SAN IS A HALF-DEMON, CORRECT?
I WAS WONDERING IF SHE'S ANY DIFFERENT NOW FROM HOW SHE USED TO BE.
THUD どた
AAH, YOU MEAN BEFORE SHE FELL?
どた THUD
HUMANS...
...FALL,
ARE EXORCISED,
AND BECOME HALF-DEMONS.
THEIR PERSONA CHANGES WHEN THEY FIRST FALL,
THEN CHANGES AGAIN WHEN THEY'RE EXORCISED.
BUT, THEN...
どた THUD
RIGHT. THEY JUST RETURN TO THE OUTSET.
SO THERE SHOULDN'T BE ANY DRASTIC CHANGES.
どた THUD
BUT FALLING DID LEAVE SOME SORT OF IMPACT ON HER MENTALITY.
ON HER OUTLOOK ON LIFE, SO TO SPEAK.
どた THUD
どた THUD
SHE BECAME MUCH MORE CHEERFUL THAN BEFORE.

OUT-LOOK...
ガラッ
SLIDE
THERE-FORE, YOU TOO...
...SHOULD CHANGE!
ぼちゃん
SPLOOSH
GYAAAH!
ぽんっ
PLAP
PHEW...
ぱん
PAT
ぱん
PAT
I HAVEN'T COME DOWN HERE IN FOREVER.
I USED TO COME ALL THE TIME...
ガタッ
CLUNK

RIGHT HERE. I'D SIT HERE...
...AND DIG THROUGH BOOK AFTER BOOK.
...I SURE WAS A CHARMLESS KID...
AKINA'S GRANDPA...
...CAN I READ SOME BOOKS?
HEY, THERE. COME ON IN.
YOU SURE HAVE PECULIAR TASTES, COMING HERE TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

THIS PLACE HAS A LOT OF UNUSUAL BOOKS.
THEY'RE OLD AND DUSTY, THAT'S FOR SURE.
ガシャ
KA-THUNK
IT'D BE NICE IF AKINA WOULD READ A LITTLE MORE INSTEAD OF RUNNING AROUND ALL THE TIME.
WELL, I GUESS THAT'S HOW BOYS OUGHT TO BE.
ALL RIGHT. DON'T STAY DOWN THERE TOO LONG.
ぽっ
FOH
IT'S BRIGHTER, BUT STILL DARK.
THEN AGAIN...
...THIS DIMNESS IS NICE.
HERE I READ BOOKS THAT COULDN'T BE FOUND ANYWHERE ELSE.
BOOKS ABOUT THE TWO REALMS.
BOOKS ABOUT TUNING.
BOOKS ABOUT THE SEVEN PILLARS... THAT WERE TOO DIFFICULT FOR ME TO READ.
AND...


...A BOOK ABOUT THE PHENOMENON KNOWN AS "FALLING."
SIMPLY PUT, IT INVOLVES A DEMON FROM THE OTHER REALM TAKING OVER ONE'S BODY.
THE QUESTION IS, HOW DO THEY CHOOSE WHO TO HIJACK?
PEOPLE WITH WICKED HEARTS?
PEOPLE BURDENED WITH WORRIES?
PEOPLE WHO ARE UNHAPPY WITH THEIR LIVES?
PEOPLE WHO ARE LONELY?
NO.

ALL IT IS...
...IS A CASE OF BAD LUCK.
はっ
SNAP

...UH-OH. I NODDED OFF.
HAH...
UGH.
I HATE REMEMBERING THAT TIME...
...
ガタッ
CLUNK
...IT'S DARK.
THE DARK...
よろ
SWAY
よろ...
SWAY
THE DARK IS BAD.
WHEN IT'S DARK...
IT FEELS LIKE SOMETHING IS TRYING TO FORCE ITSELF INSIDE OF ME.
よろ...
SWAY
AH!
FUMP
THAT'S RIGHT. I HAVE TO FIX THE LADDER...
...WITH KOTODAMA.
KOTODAMA.
KOTODAMA...
はっ
GASP

HALF-DEMON POWER...
EVEN IF SHE'S MORE CHEERFUL,
I STILL THINK SHE'S CONFLICTED INSIDE.
SHE'S BOTH HUMAN AND NOT.
OR SO WE SAY.
BUT WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT, SHE'S NOT *REALLY* HUMAN.
OF COURSE THAT'S CONFLICTING.
THE SAME GOES FOR YOU, RIGHT? YOU'RE NO LONGER A REGULAR OLD WOLF.
I CAN TALK, AFTER ALL...

BUT...I DON'T THINK IT'S SUCH A BAD THING.
THEN AGAIN, I THINK HUMANS AND WOLVES ARE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.
TRUE ENOUGH.
I'M GOING TO EXAMINE YOU IN ALL SORTS OF WAYS FROM NOW ON, SO YOU WON'T HAVE TIME TO WORRY.
NU FU FU...
G-GIVE ME A BREAK...
I MEAN, LOOK. THERE'S SOMEONE WORTH EXAMINING MUCH MORE THAN ME.
THOUGH I GUESS SHE'S A GOD, NOT A HUMAN.
A GOD, EH?
HONESTLY, IT'S NOT REALLY WORTH RESEARCHING GODS.
REALLY?
AT A GLANCE, THEY'RE BUILT JUST LIKE PEOPLE,
YET THEY'RE TOO DETACHED FROM THIS WORLD'S PRINCIPLES.
...IN OTHER WORDS, THEY'RE TOO MUCH OF A BLACK BOX.
AND WE CAN'T EVEN DETERMINE THE EXISTENCE OF SAID BOX.
THAT'S WHY THEY'RE JUST BOOORING.
HYOO! SILKY SMOOTH...

ROKKAKU!
ON IT!
WHOOSH
WHAT A RESEARCH MANIAC...
!
...WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?
AAH! DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE WITH SHIINA-SAN.
I'M SCARED!
...
IT IS UNQUESTIONABLE THAT "PEOPLE"...
...CANNOT KILL "PEOPLE" WITHOUT REASON, EVEN IF NO ONE ELSE FINDS OUT.

THERE EXISTS SOMETHING KNOWN AS THE "SUPEREGO" IN THE HEARTS OF "PEOPLE" WHICH ACTS AS BRAKES FOR THEIR ACTIONS.
MORALITY, ETHICS, THOSE SORTS OF BRAKES.
IT'S A WAY OF THINKING THAT CALLS BACK TO THE OLD SAYING, "THE SUN IS ALWAYS WATCHING."
THEY SAY PSYCHOPATHS ARE CAPABLE OF KILLING WITHOUT REASON,
BUT MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE REASON IS FOR SIMPLE "PLEASURE"
BUT A HEART WHICH HAS "FALLEN" IS CAPABLE OF SUCH A FEAT.
AND THEY HAVE THE POWER TO KILL PEOPLE.
KILL...
...PEOPLE.
KILL THEM EASILY.
KILL!

AH!
どっち ガん
KA-THUD
OWW... JEEEEZ.
AH!
K-KOTOHA-CHAN! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
ぶる SHIVER
ぶる SHIVER
...ALL RIGHT.

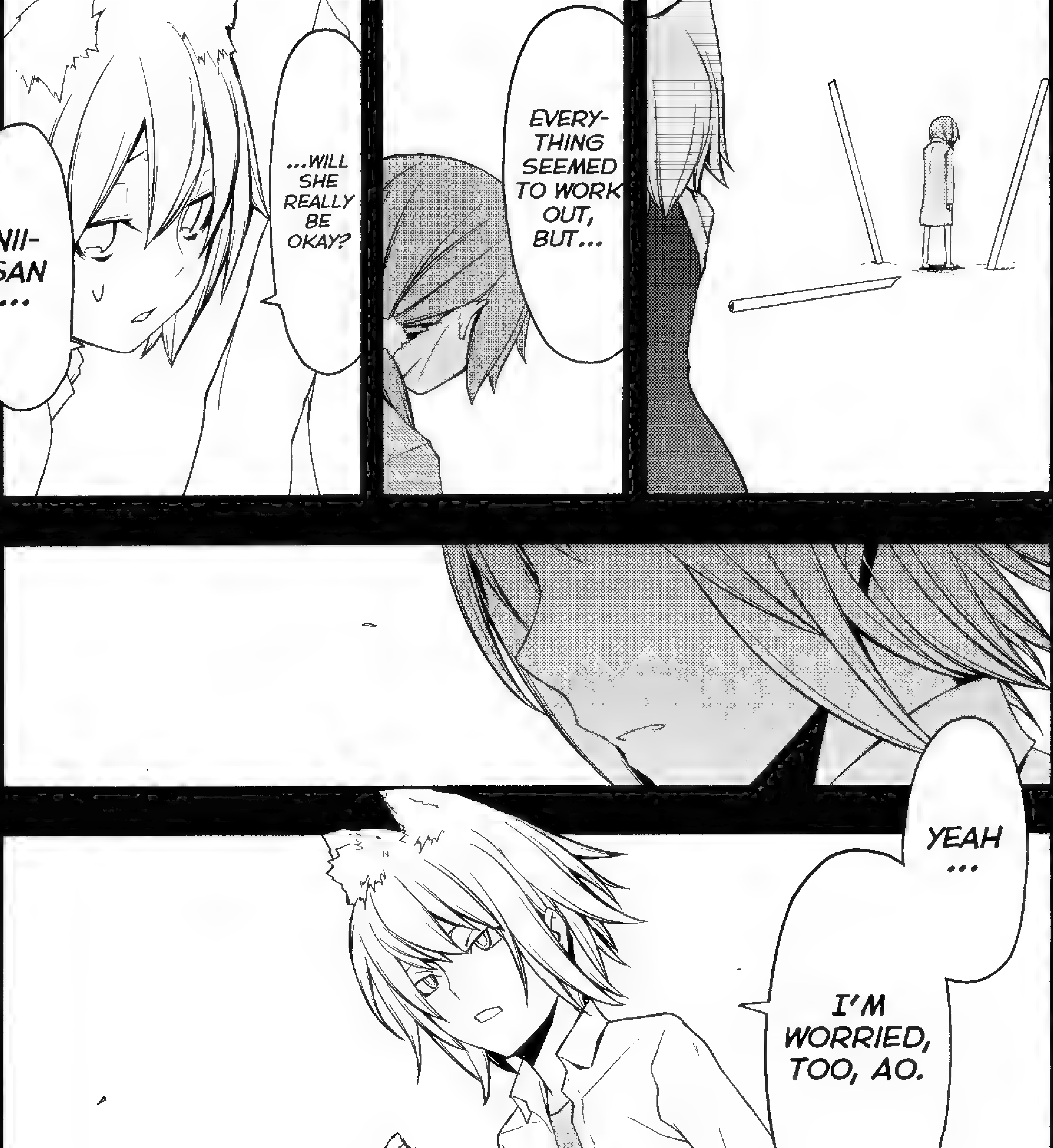
I EXORCISED HER COMPLETELY.
SHE SHOULD BE FINE NOW.
TAKE THE INJURED TO THE HOSPITAL!
KYOSUKE!
ONII-CHAN, HANG IN THERE!
ONII-CHAN!
FEARED BY HUMANS...
KYOSUKE! KEEP IT TOGETHER!
ONII-CHAN! ONII-CHAN!
キッ
GLARE
...YET SHUNNED BY DEMONS.
THAT'S...
...CHAN.
KOTOHA-CHAN.

KOTOHA-CHAN!
ARE YOU OKAY?
PUSH
AAH!
HEY...! WHAT'S WRONG, KOTOHA-CHAN?
...
...SHORT-CUT.
BZT

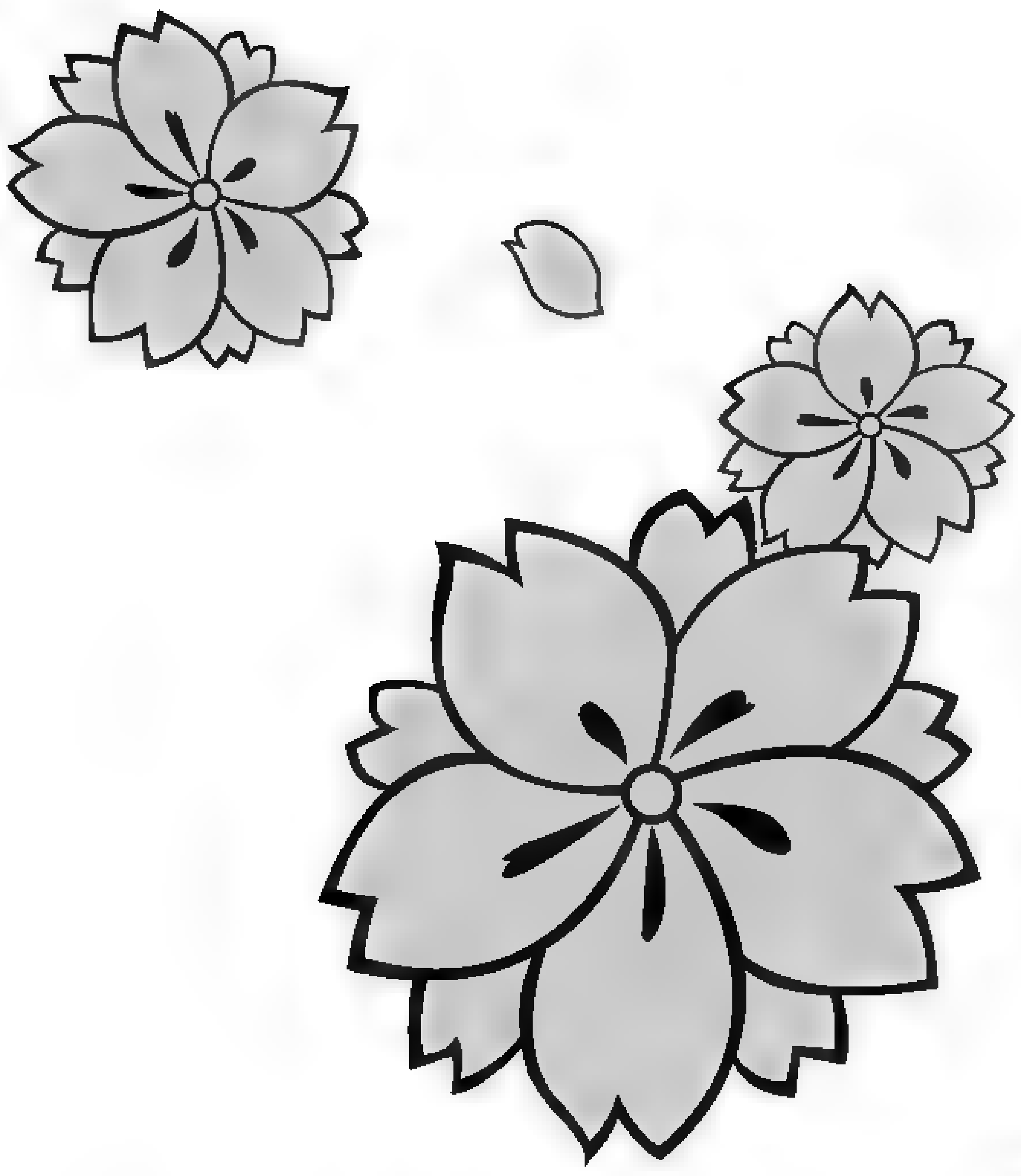
"KITCHEN KNIVES."
KINK
WHA?!
FWOO
HUH?!
HEY!
WAIT, KOTOHA-CHAN!
FWOO
BZZT
SHING
I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT HER KOTODAMA.
SOMETHING.
ANYTHING...

ぬ
SMOOCH
じた
ばた
FLAP
FLAP
...!
...
くた...
FLOP

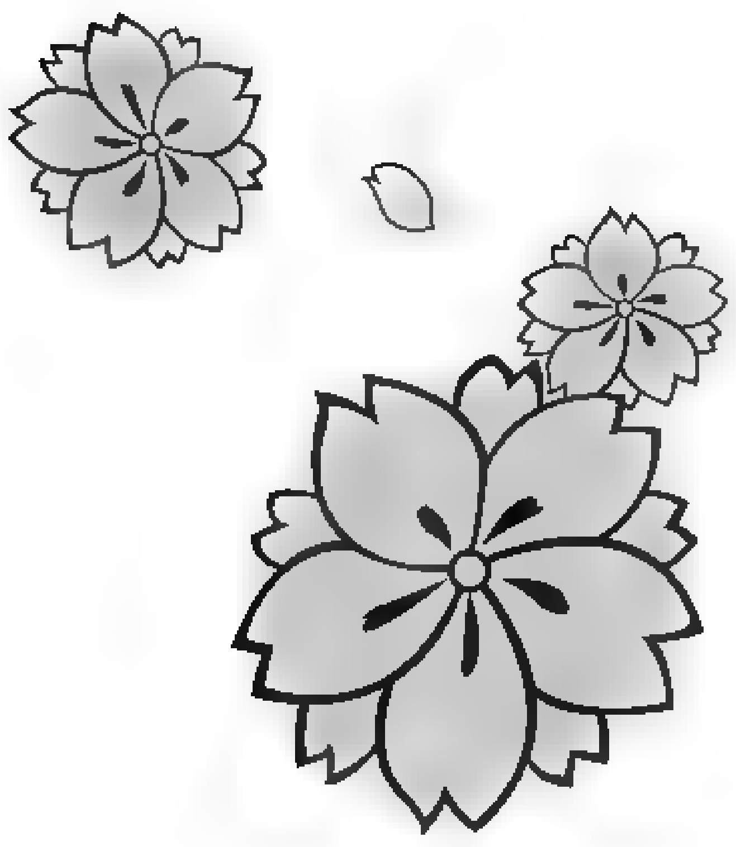
BWAH...
ぷはぁっ
...AGH! MY TONGUE!
AND MY PRECIOUS FIRST YOU KNOW WHAT...!
うぉーん
UWAAH!
...NO, NOW'S NOT THE TIME FOR THAT! KOTOHA-CHAN!
KEEP IT TOGETHER!
KOTOHA-CHAN!
KOTOHA-CHAAAN!


EVERYTHING SEEMED TO WORK OUT, BUT...
...WILL SHE REALLY BE OKAY?
NII-SAN...
YEAH...
I'M WORRIED, TOO, AO.

65TH NIGHT STORY (PART THREE) END



YOZAKURA
QUARTET 12



PSHH
PSHH
YAWN...
THE DELICIOUS SMELL OF RICE COOKING...
AND ONE NIGHT AFTER WE GET BACK FROM A FUN TRIP TO HAKONE...
チュン CHIRP
チュン CHIRP
I BET EVERYONE WILL SAY WE'RE BEING SUPER LEISURELY...
ぼー SPAAACE
はっ GASP
WELL, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO PUT THAT MUCH MORE EFFORT...

NII-SAAAN! DON'T STARE AT ME WHILE I'M CHANGING! IT'S EMBARRASSING!
LOOK OVER THERE!
ばた
CLACK
BAD!
ぎゅ
HUG
NII-SAN ISN'T IN THIS PHOTO.
AFTER ALL, HE'S STILL ALIVE.
THIS IS JUST A PHOTO AND NOTHING MORE.
ALL RIGHT! TIME FOR BREAKFAST!
RIIICE! RIIICE! TASTY WHITE RICE!
ぺろり
LICK
おいっ
YUM
THANKS FOR THE FOOD!
NOW TO GO TO WORK IN GOOD CHEER!
I'LL NEED THIS, AND THAT...
ごそ
RUSTLE
ごそ
RUSTLE
...

AND THIS AS A GOOD LUCK CHARM.
すっ SLIP
I'M OFF!

#66: STORY (PART FOUR)

LOOKS LIKE KOTOHA-CHAN'S ON CLEANING DUTY THIS WEEK.
WEEKLY CLEANING DUTY
AKINA
KOTOHA
AO
WELL...
I'LL JUST DO IT FOR HER.
しゅるん
SWISH
SHE SAID THERE WAS A BOOK SHE WANTED TO READ, SO I'LL GIVE HER MORE FREE TIME.
THIS IS PART OF A WIFE'S JOB, TOO.
JUST KIDDING.
MORNIN'!
どや TO
どや DO
MORNING.
GOOD MORNING!

HUH? WAS IT YOUR TURN TO CLEAN, AO?
THIS IS JUST A FREEBIE.
SHALL WE GO AHEAD AND INVESTIGATE THE PILLARS?
NAH, LET'S WAIT UNTIL AFTER HIME AND THE OTHERS GET OUT OF SCHOOL.
UNTIL THEN, IT'S A REGULAR WORK DAY.
ジャキィ
FWIP
ROGER! A LOT PILED UP SINCE WE WENT TO HAKONE, AFTER ALL.
HM?
WHERE'S THE PHOTO TODAY?
...OH.
THAT'S RIGHT.
I HAVE TO KEEP IT OUT OR ELSE I'LL SLACK OFF.
とん
TAK
PLEASE DON'T.

MMM...
さら さら
SKRIT
SKRIT
I'M PRETTY SURE IT LOOKED LIKE THIS.
DID IT SPLIT? OR DID IT BRANCH?
HMM...
YARI-ZAKURA.
YARI-ZAKURA!
ARE YOU LISTENING?
ポッ
BOP
WAH!
STRANGE, YOU'RE USUALLY SO DILIGENT, YARI-ZAKURA.
STAND UP AND READ, PLEASE.
AH... SORRY!
UMM. LET'S SEE...
PAGE 36, HIME!
THE SIXTH SECTION!
やんや
CLAMOR
やんや
CLAMOR
DON'T TELL HER!
わい
RABBLE
わい
RABBLE
THANKS!
...THE SENATE PLANS TO SEND SHIINA.
FOR NOW, CONCENTRATE ON CLASS.
Y-YES, SIR.
I HAVE TO GO INVESTIGATE AFTER SCHOOL.
BEFORE THAT, IS IT ALMOST LUNCHTIME...?
I THINK, THEREFORE I AM...

比泉生活相
Sign: Hiizumi Life Counseling Office
HEYA!
SCHOOL'S OUT! WANNA GO TAKE A LOOK NOW?
PLOP
ぼよん
HEY, KOTOHA-CHAN.
YEAH, BUT YOU'RE STAYING HERE, KOTOHA.
JURI-SAN'S GOING TO STOP BY AT SOME POINT.
OH, I SEE...
GREETINGS! EVERYONE HERE?
HEY.
ALL RIGHT, LET'S MOVE OUT, THEN.
WE'LL DO TWO GROUPS. AO AND ME IN ONE GROUP, AND AKINA AND KYOSUKE IN ANOTHER.
WHAT ABOUT TOUKA?
SHE'S GOING TO COME HERE AFTER SHE FINISHES MAKING DINNER.
I GUESS SHE'S BRINGING SOME FOOD IN SINCE IT'LL PROBABLY BE A LONG NIGHT.
わいわい
CHATTER
THIS GROUP HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE SAME.
EVER SINCE WE WERE KIDS...

HIME-CHAN USED TO BE SO TIMID WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE.
NOW SHE'S ALWAYS ON HER TOES SINCE SHE'S THE MAYOR...
...BUT SHE'S REALLY JUST A KIND GIRL.
I BECAME FRIENDS WITH KOTOHA-CHAN A WHILE AFTER EVERYONE ELSE.
...HM? HOW DID WE BECOME FRIENDS AGAIN?
OH, WELL.
AKINA-SAN AND KYOSUKE-SAN WERE ALWAYS FIGHTING.
PROBABLY BECAUSE AKINA-SAN USED TO MEDDLE A LOT,
SAYING KYOSUKE-SAN SPOILED TOUKA-CHAN TOO MUCH.
AND THE ONE WHO'D ALWAYS BREAK THEM UP WAS...
WAS...
AAAO!

HURRY UP, OR I'LL LEAVE YOU BEHIND!
...AH!
WAIT UP, HIME-CHAN!
AO...
DON'T LOOK SO DOWN.
...

WHY DO YOU HAVE TO BE SENT TO THE OTHER SIDE, NII-SAN?
…
THE BURDEN OF SENDING A DEMON IS LIGHTER THAN SENDING A HUMAN.
WE ORIGINALLY BELONG IN THAT DIMENSION, AFTER ALL.
BUT… THERE ARE PLENTY OF OTHER DEMONS BESIDES YOU.
…BECAUSE I'M A SATORI.
NOT ONLY CAN I READ PEOPLE'S HEARTS, I CAN TRANSMIT MY HEART TO OTHERS, AS WELL.
WITH THIS POWER, I MIGHT BE ABLE TO TELL EVERYONE ON THIS SIDE WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THAT SIDE.
WE NEED ANY CLUES WE CAN GET AS TO HOW TO STOP THE SEVEN PILLARS FROM BLOOMING.
…
AND THE ONE WHO'S CARRYING THE BURDEN OF SENDING ME IS…
…AKINA, RIGHT?
DON'T YOU THINK IT'S HARD FOR AKINA-SAN TO SEND HIS FRIEND?
NO.
IT'S BECAUSE WE'RE FRIENDS THAT I'M THE BEST CHOICE.

SENDING A FRIEND IS MUCH EASIER THAN SENDING SOMEONE HE HARDLY KNOWS.
THAT'S JUST HOW AKINA IS.
WHY?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHY...?
WHY? THAT'S EASY.
BECAUSE I DON'T MIND BEING SENT BY AKINA, EITHER.
THAT'S WHY THIS IS FOR THE BEST.
DON'T WORRY. IF THE DESCENDANTS OF THE BRANCH FAMILY ARE STILL ALIVE, I'M SURE THEY'LL HELP ME.
THEY'RE AKINA'S RELATIVES, AFTER ALL.
I'M SURE THEY'RE ALL GOOD-NATURED PEOPLE.

ARE... ARE YOU REALLY NOT SCARED, NII-SAN?
OR ARE YOU JUST SAYING THAT TO HIDE–
BUMP
!
AO...
WE'RE SATORI. WE CAN READ THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF OTHER PEOPLE.
BZT
BZT
SO YOU KNOW WE CAN'T HIDE ANYTHING FROM EACH OTHER.
SEE?
IS THERE ANY HINT IN MY MIND...
THAT I'M AFRAID...
...OR THAT I DON'T TRUST AKINA?
BZT
...

YOU'RE AMAZING, NII-SAN...
THAT'S NOT TRUE.
YOU HAVE TO KEEP IT TOGETHER EVEN AFTER I'M GONE, AO.
MAKE SURE YOU EAT BREAKFAST EVERY DAY.
OKAY...
IF YOU'RE EVER IN TROUBLE, TALK TO AKINA OR KYOSUKE. I ASKED THEM TO LOOK AFTER YOU.
OF COURSE, THAT GOES FOR HIME AND KOTOHA, TOO.
OKAY...

AAH, I DOZED OFF...
むく SIT
ARE HIME-CHAN AND ZAKURO-CHAN STILL UP TOP?
I WONDER HOW IT LOOKS.
...
DAAAZE ぼー……
I FEEL LIKE I DREAM ABOUT NII-SAN A LOT LATELY.
OR MAYBE NOT...
YAWN... ふあ…
WELL, I'M BORED, AND IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THEY'RE COMING DOWN YET...
GUESS I'LL CALL KOTOHA-CHAN.
SHE'S ALL ALONE AT THE OFFICE, TOO.
BOOP ポピ
プルル… BRRR
プルル…… BRRR
プルル…… BRRR
RUB RUB ホニホニ

BOOO. SHE WON'T PICK UP. I WONDER IF SHE'S SLEEPING.
ゴろ
ROLL
ブルルル…
BRRR
ゴろ
ROLL
LIKE SHE DOZED OFF WHILE READING OR SOMETHING... I GUESS THAT'S NOT REALLY LIKE HER.
IT'S NOT GOOD TO SLACK OFF, KOTOHA-CHAN...
TAKE A LOOK, AO.
ISN'T THIS TOWN GORGEOUS?
NII-SAN...
ぐす
SNIFF
ヒュウウウウ
FWOOOO

THUD
...!
...

HEY.
FUMP
じん
I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU IN A WHILE.
GRIND めき
GRIND めき…
AGH!
HNN…
WH-
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
YOU GUYS ALWAYS ASK THAT.
ぐッ GRR
AAH!
ぐッ GRR
IS IT SO WRONG FOR ME TO BE HERE? MY FAMILY IS FROM THIS TOWN, YOU KNOW.
AH…!
HAH…
ぐ… GRR
AAH… MUSIC TO MY EARS.
NOT BAD AT ALL.
NO…
YOU DON'T GET THIS WITH DAMAGED GOODS.
THE TECHNIQUE ESCAPES ME.
LIKE THIS?
NAH!
ぐッ GRR
AH…
OR THIS?
ぐぐッ GRR

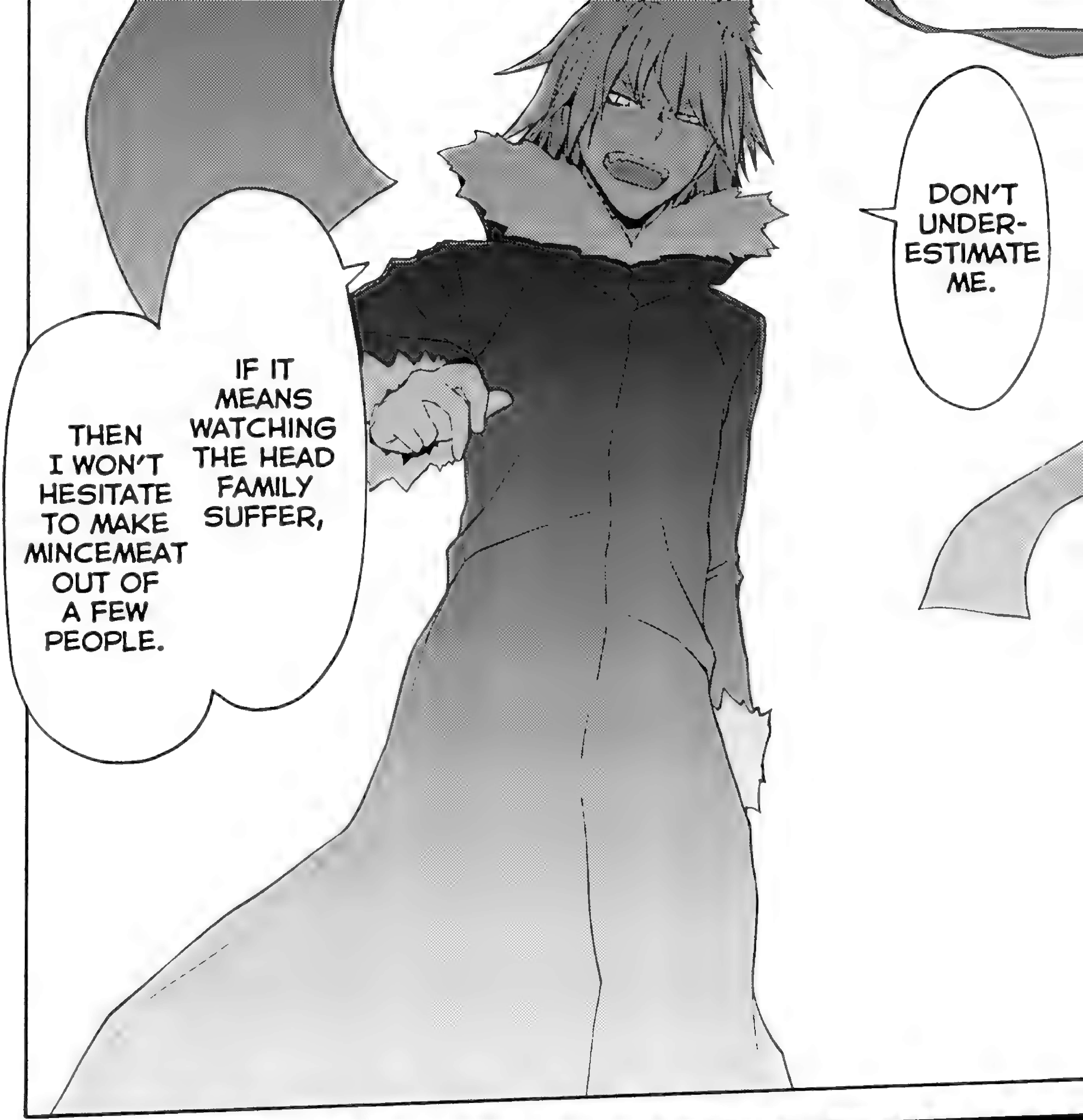
STOP ...
STOP DOING AWFUL THINGS ...
...WITH NII-SAN'S FACE.
STOP SAYING AWFUL THINGS.
PLEASE ...
...WHAT A BUZZ-KILL.
す，
SWIF

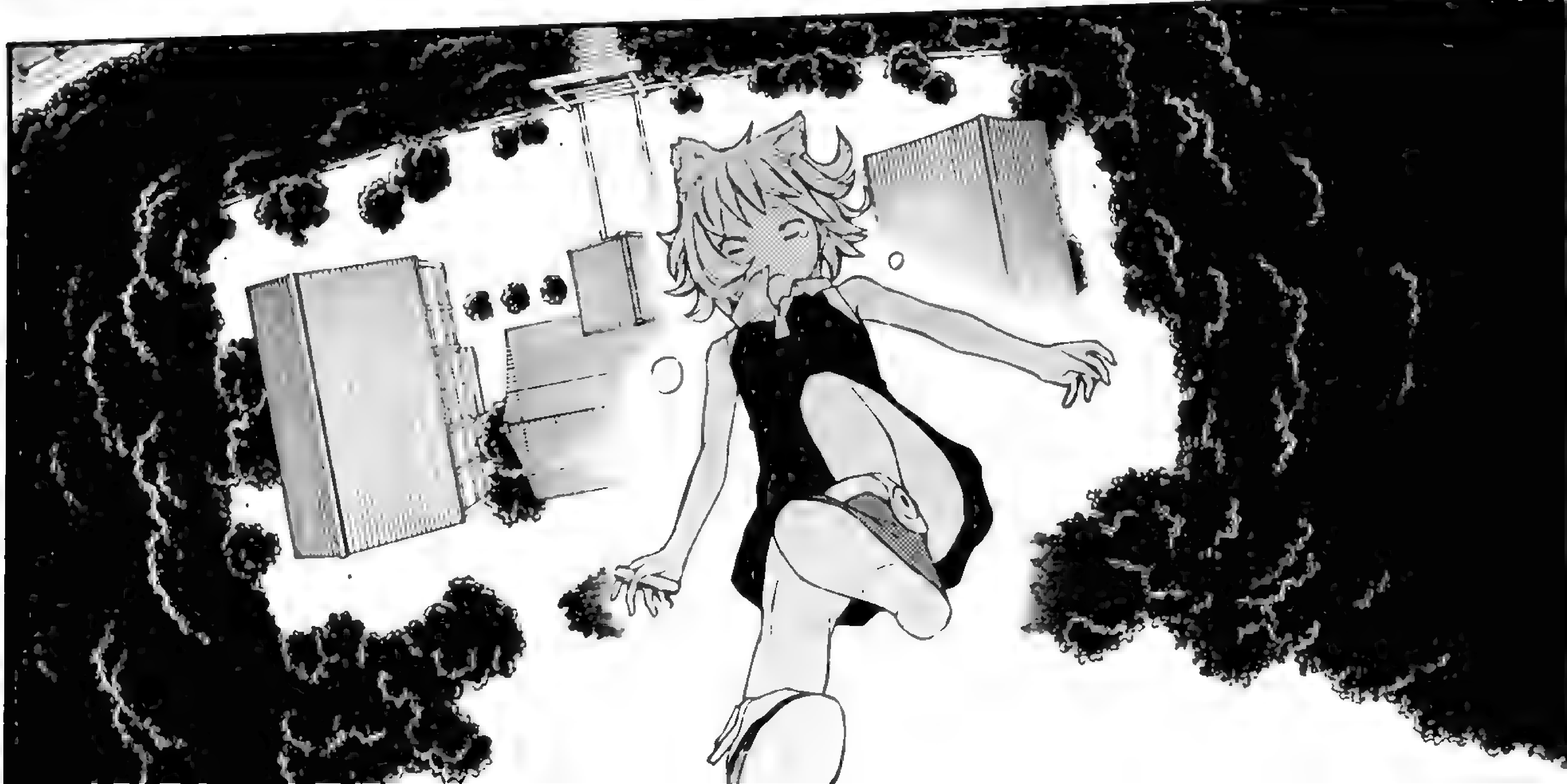
THAT WOUND... WAIT!
I HAVE A BANDAGE.
ごそ
RUSTLE
WHAT FOR?
THIS KIND OF WOUND WILL HEAL IN NO TIME FOR A DEMON.
LEAVE ME BE.
NO!
SNAP
ぽん
THAT'S NOT YOUR BODY. IT'S NII-SAN'S!
I'LL DRESS IT PROPERLY!
...I'M YOUR ENEMY, YOU KNOW.
YOU THINK I'LL LISTEN TO YOU?
...I HEARD A LOT FROM KANA.
YOU'RE NOT EVIL TO THE CORE.
I GET THE FEELING YOU CAN'T BECOME COMPLETELY EVIL.

I'M SURE A LOT HAPPENED BETWEEN THE HIIZUMI HEAD FAMILY AND YOURS,
BUT I DON'T THINK YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO HURT PEOPLE.
YOU'RE JUST STEELING YOUR HEART FOR THE SAKE OF REVENGE.
THAT'S WHAT I THINK.
WHAT A STUPID IDEA...
IT'S NOT STUPID!
BZZZZT
!
STOP IT!
DON'T READ MY HEART...
THERE'S NO WAY YOU TRULY WANT TO DO THESE AWFUL THINGS!
AFTER ALL, NII-SAN'S HEART IS STILL INSIDE OF YOU.
HE WOULD NEVER ALLOW THAT!
YOU'RE WRONG. THERE'S NOTHING LEFT...
ZZZT

THERE IS! I'M SURE OF IT!
WHERE IS IT?! WHERE IS NII-SAN'S HEART?!
BZT
ERGH…
BZT
BZT
BZT
STOP!
BZT
BZT
DON'T DRAG IT OUT…!
BZT
…SAN.
ZZZ
ZZZ
NII-SAN!
ZZZ
THERE IT IS!
NII-SAN'S HEART…!

どん
PUSH
JUST KIDDING.
I'VE GOTTEN QUITE GOOD AT TRANSMITTING FABRICATED THOUGHTS, DON'T YOU THINK?
CAN'T BECOME COMPLETELY EVIL, YOU SAY?


DON'T UNDERESTIMATE ME.
IF IT MEANS WATCHING THE HEAD FAMILY SUFFER,
THEN I WON'T HESITATE TO MAKE MINCEMEAT OUT OF A FEW PEOPLE.



ROKKA-KU!
ON IT!
WHOOSH

TATATATATATATA
...!

I...
I WON'T MAKE IT...!

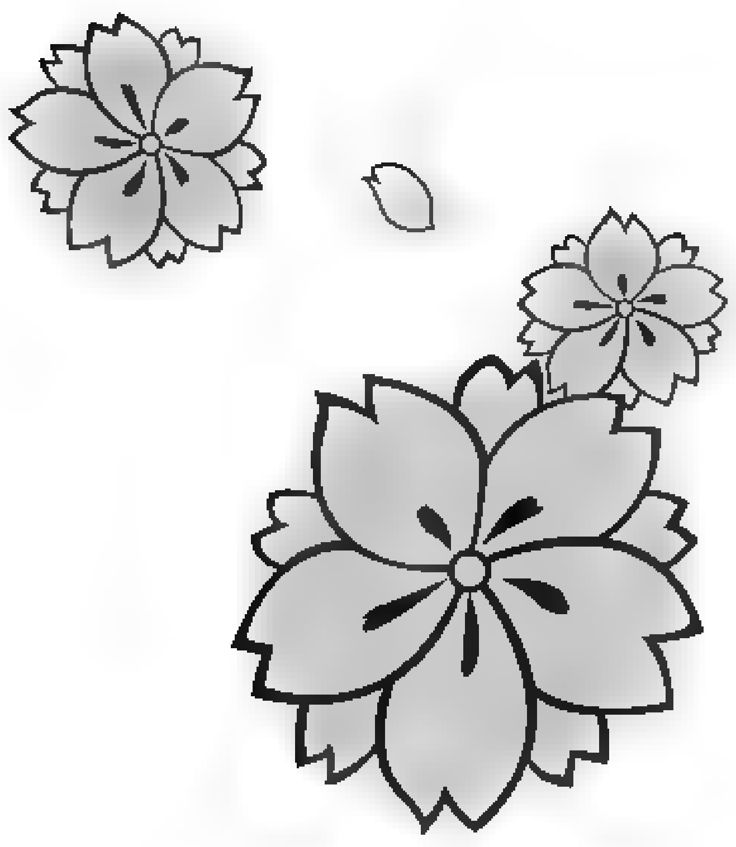
THUD
どさっ……

...
CLENCH
HMPH.

...LUDICROUS.
ヒュッ FWOO
ぱさっ FLAP
...

66TH NIGHT STORY (PART FOUR) END

YOZAKURA QUARTET
12



YOZAKURA QUARTET 12

YOU'RE GOING TO INSPECT THE SEVEN PILLARS NOW?
YOU DIDN'T GO YESTERDAY?
TALK ABOUT LEISURELY...
RIGHT?
YOU'LL JUST HAVE PUT THAT MUCH MORE EFFORT INTO INVESTIGATING.
ARE YOU GOING BY YOURSELF, HIME-CHAN?
I WANT TO CHECK OUT THE OTHER PILLARS BESIDES THE SIXTH, SO WE MIGHT SPLIT UP INTO GROUPS.
SHUT
PHEW... SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF LEGWORK.
I'LL BRING IN SOME FOOD SINCE YOU'LL PROBABLY BE WORKING LATE.
MUCH OBLIGED.
OH, SAWAKI! I'M HEADING TO THE SHRINE SOON.
OKAY. I'LL FINISH UP EARLY AND HEAD HOME SOON.
HUH? YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT.
I WAS JUST GONNA WORK UP A LIGHT SWEAT SINCE THERE'S NO CLUB TODAY, ANYWAY.

CLUB, HUH?
MAYBE I SHOULD JOIN ONE, TOO.
KINDA LATE, THOUGH...
YOU DID ARCHERY IN MIDDLE SCHOOL, DIDN'T YOU?
WHY DID YOU STOP?
MY POWER WOULD GET UNSTABLE EVEN WITH MY RESTRAINTS ON...
BUT YOU DON'T EVEN WEAR THEM ANYMORE.
THAT'S TRUE.
MAYBE I'LL PICK IT UP AGAIN.
OR MAYBE I'LL JUST WAIT UNTIL I GO TO COLLEGE.
WILL YOU EVEN MAKE IT IN? YOU DON'T STUDY MUCH.
I...I STILL HAVE TIME!
YOU GUYS...
...HAVE NO PROBLEM TALKING ABOUT A YEAR OR TWO DOWN THE ROAD, HUH?
WHY WOULD WE?
YOU TALK ABOUT THE FUTURE, TOO, MIDORIKO
I MEAN... THE BLOSSOMING MIGHT HAPPEN NOT EVEN A YEAR FROM NOW, RIGHT?
WHEN I REMEMBER THAT, I...
WE'LL STOP IT,
SO THERE'S NO PROBLEM.
UH-HUH!

IN THAT CASE, MAYBE I SHOULD PICK UP ARCHERY AGAIN NOW.
THEN I CAN FIGHT AS A BOWMAN...
AS A LONG-RANGE UNIT...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO FIGHT, TOUKA.
...
HOW RELIABLE.
んぎゅ
HUG
IF I DIDN'T HAVE UZU-CHAN, I'D HAVE BECOME YOUR WIFE, HIME.
WHAT IS THIS GIRL BABBLING ABOUT?
OH.
IT'S KOTOHA.
AND MIZUKI.
YOU'RE RIGHT!
HEEEY!
KOTOHA-CHAN! HEEEY!
SHE CAN'T HEAR YOU.
LOOKS LIKE SHE'S HEADED STRAIGHT TO THE OFFICE.

KOTOHA-CHAAAN!
I'M GOING TO BRING IN FOOD LATER! WHAT DO YOU WANT?
HEEEY!
WHAT'S UP, HIME-CHAN?
IS THERE SOMETHING ON MY FACE?
NO... IT'S NOTHING.
I'LL SEE YOU LATER.
のこへこ
PLOD PLOD
PHEW...
AH, TOUKA-CHAN.
WHAT'S WRONG, RIN-CHAN? WHY ARE YOU SIGHING?

I WAS GIVING A FOREIGNER DIRECTIONS AND GOT A LITTLE EXHAUSTED MENTALLY...
HUH?!
RIN-CHAN CAN SPEAK ENGLISH?!
I SHOULD ASK HER TO TEACH ME
GOING TO THE OFFICE?
UH-HUH. I'M THE PRIMARY PROVISIONS PARTY.
IT'S TOO EARLY FOR DINNER, SO I JUST STEWED A LITTLE SOMETHING.
I SEE. WELL, I WON'T KEEP YOU.
ガチャ
CLACK
HELLOOO!
スポッ
SLIP
どさっ
THUD

WHAT'S UP, HIME-CHAN?
LET'S GOOO!
O-OKAY.
HIME-CHAAAN!
SORRY! SORRY...

67TH NIGHT STORY (PART FIVE)

WELL, THIS IS A PICKLE.
TO THINK SHE'D HAVE THIS MUCH POWER AFTER FALLING...
THE FALLEN SOUL AND HOST MUST HAVE HAD GOOD AFFINITY.
NOW...
GRAND-PA!
ぱた ぱた
PIT PAT
STAY BACK, AKI-NA!
FWOO
WHOOSH
!

CLANG
ONII-CHAN!
AKINA! TAKE KYOSUKE AND GET BACK!
HIME!
YOU, TOO!
NO!
CREEP
にゅ
SINCE GRANDMA'S BEDRIDDEN, AS THE FUTURE MAYOR, I HAVE TO KEEP IT TOGETHER!
IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO, GRANDPA MAKIHARU?
...
SINCE SHE'S FALLEN TO SUCH AN EXTENT, EXORCISING HER IS...
IT CAN'T BE HELPED.
FZZT
!
YOU'RE GONNA SEND HER?!

REALLY?!
GIVEN HOW FAR SHE'S FALLEN...
PULL
ぎゅ
...
HIME,
ARE YOU FRIENDS WITH THAT GIRL?
HUH?
I HAVEN'T PLAYED WITH HER MUCH...
WE'RE NOT FRIENDS RIGHT NOW...
...BUT SOMEDAY...
...I SEE.
THEN IT'S MY JOB TO CREATE SOMEDAY FOR YOU GIRLS.
OTHERWISE MY HONOR AS AN ADULT WILL BE SHOT.
YOU ASKED IF THERE'S ANYTHING YOU CAN DO, RIGHT?

THAT GIRL IS GOING TO CARRY A HEAVY BURDEN FROM NOW ON.
WHEN THE TIME COMES, I WANT YOU TO BE FRIENDS WITH HER.
...
THAT'S NOT RIGHT, GRANDPA MAKIHARU.
YOU DON'T BECOME FRIENDS WITH SOMEONE BECAUSE YOU WERE ASKED TO.
I WANT TO BE HER FRIEND!
SORRY ABOUT THAT.
WELL, SEEING AS MY DEPENDABLE FRIENDS HAVE ARRIVED...
SKF
LET'S GIVE IT ONE FINAL PUSH, SHALL WE?
FRIEND? SAYS WHO?
SAVE THE BICKERING FOR AFTERWARD.

HURRY, HURRY!
BRING THE AMBULANCE OVER HERE!
ONII-CHAN!
...
KYOSUKE!
GLARE
!
GRIT

のこ
TMP
のこ
TMP
…
のこ
TMP
のこ
TMP

LET'S GO AROUND, HIME-CHAN!
AH...
HEY, TOUKA. KYOSUKE'S ALL BETTER NOW, RIGHT?
SO...
...
...

IT TAKES A LITTLE WHILE TO GET USED TO GLASSES.
COME SEE ME AGAIN IN A WEEK.
MAN, THEY DON'T SUIT YOU AT ALL, KYOSUKE!
YOU LOOK SO SERIOUS NOW.
GIVE ME A BREAK!
WHY IS ONII-CHAN WEARING GLASSES?
DON'T TELL ME HIS INJURY...
HUH?!
BECAUSE OF THAT...
キッ
GLARE

TOU-KA...
FWIP
WHY SO BLUE, HIME?
I'M NOT...
...

...
HIME.
YOU WANT TO BE FRIENDS WITH THAT GIRL, DON'T YOU?
!
WHA ?!
H-HEY! DON'T READ MY MIND, GIN!
I DIDN'T.
I DO WANT TO BE HER FRIEND...
...BUT TOUKA'S ACTING LIKE THAT.
I WANT TO BE HER FRIEND...
...BUT I STILL WANT TO BE FRIENDS WITH TOUKA, TOO.
AND... I WANT TOUKA AND HER TO BE FRIENDS, TOO.
BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT I SHOULD DO.

...
THE REASON TOUKA'S ANGRY IS BECAUSE OF MY EYES, RIGHT?
THEN THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE.
クイッ
PUSH
?
WH-
WHAAAT?!
YOU WERE GOING TO GET GLASSES, ANYWAY...?
I'D BEEN GETTING MORE NEARSIGHTED FOR A WHILE.
THE INJURY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.
WHA...? HUH...?

B-BUT SHE STILL HURT YOU WHILE SHE WAS FALLEN!
THAT'S...
TOU-KA.
IT WAS JUST BAD LUCK THAT SHE FELL.
SHE DIDN'T CHOOSE TO FALL.
YOU KNOW THAT, RIGHT?
...
BUT...I DON'T KNOW HOW I SHOULD EVEN APPROACH HER ANYMORE.
HEEEY!
I BROUGHT A NEW FRIEND!
LET'S PLAY TOGETHER!
UMM...

SAY, KYOSUKE.
SINCE WHEN DID YOUR EYESIGHT GET WORSE?
BEATS ME.
I FORGOT WHEN EXACTLY.
BUT IT'S NOT KOTOHA'S FAULT IT GOT WORSE.
ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?
HMM. HOW STRANGE.
I CAN SOMEHOW READ HIS MIND EVEN WITHOUT USING MY SATORI POWER.
UH-HUH. EVEN I CAN.
I DUNNO WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT.

ぎし、
GSH
TOUKA-CHAN! SINCE WHEN WERE YOU DOWN THERE...?
SIGH. SHEESH...
FOR NOW, LET'S LAY HER DOWN ON THE COUCH.
WE'LL CALL AN AMBULANCE IF NEEDED.
SHE LOOKS OKAY...I GUESS?
I APOLOGIZED TO EVERYONE I HURT,
BUT THIS POWER IS STILL INSIDE OF ME.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I SHOULD DO WITH IT.
DO WITH IT? THAT'S EASY...

USE IT TO HELP PEOPLE?
WOW.
YOU'RE LIKE A SATORI.
BUT I HURT EVERYONE WITH THIS POWER.
I'M NOT SURE IF IT'S OKAY TO USE.
I SEE.
IN THAT CASE...
...JUST USE IT REGULARLY LIKE NORMAL.
WHAT? BUT THEN...
WHETHER IT'S A KITCHEN KNIFE OR A CAR,
AS THEY ARE, THEY CAN BE USED TO KILL PEOPLE.
OR YOU CAN LEARN TO COOK,
AND GET YOUR LICENSE.
TAME YOUR POWER IN THAT SENSE.
IT'D BE BAD IF YOU COULDN'T USE KOTODAMA WELL WHEN YOU REALLY NEED TO, RIGHT?
THAT'S TRUE, BUT...
IT'S NOT A BAD THING TO POLISH ONE'S ABILITIES.
WHETHER OR NOT YOU USE IT TO SAVE SOMEONE SOMEDAY...
...IS SOMETHING YOU CAN THINK ABOUT AND DECIDE WHEN THE TIME COMES.

PERSONALLY, I'D LIKE YOU TO USE IT TO SAVE AO.
SHE CAN BE PRETTY DODGY.
MAYBE THAT'S UNFAIR OF ME TO ASK.
プルルル BRRR
プルルル… BRRR
SOMEONE'S PHONE'S RINGING. IS IT KOTOHA-CHAN'S?
...SO IT SEEMS.
SHOULD WE ANSWER FOR HER?
プルルル BRRR
HRM... LET'S HAVE HER CALL BACK LATER.
プルルル… BRRR

I BROUGHT SOME WATER.
THANKS.
プルル…
BRRR
がばっ
JOLT
!
AAH!
DESPITE ACQUIRING THIS ALIEN POWER...
...EVERYONE IN TOWN OPENED UP THEIR ARMS TO ME.
GIN TOLD ME TO THINK HARD ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT TO USE MY POWER WHEN THE TIME CAME.

BUT I HAD ALREADY DECIDED THEN...
...THAT I WOULD USE MY POWER TO PROTECT SOMEONE WITHOUT HESITATION.
AFTER ALL, WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE...
...YOU DON'T HAVE EVEN A SECOND TO THINK.
THAT'S RIGHT.
NOT EVEN...
...A SECOND.

GWOH

GRSH
...!
I CAN'T FLY HIGH ...
WOO

!
SKREE
ご協力お願いします
LILA!
SHOO し
ぱ PA ぱ PA ぱ PA
ぱ PA ぱ PA ぱ PA
I'VE PREPARED FOR JUST SUCH AN OCCASION!
GWOH

Sign: We appreciate your cooperation

IT'S NO USE.
I WON'T MAKE IT...
EVEN THOUGH I HAVE THIS POWER...
I HAVE IT, AND YET...
...I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO GIVE UP?
GRIP
THAT'S JUST...

...NOT RIGHT!
HALF OF ME IS DEMON.
AND HALF IS THE OLD ME.
TOGETHER, THEY MAKE THE SELF I'VE BUILT UP OVER ALL THIS TIME.
I'VE PLAYED,
STUDIED...
...AND ABSORBED SO MANY BOOKS TO MAKE UP
ME.
AS SOMEONE WHO LOVES HAPPY ENDINGS AND READS ANYTHING I CAN GET MY HANDS ON TO FIND THEM...
...I'LL STRIVE TO LIVE TOWARDS A HAPPY ENDING.

AND SO, I'M SURE THERE'S ONE TO THIS STORY, TOO.
ルル… RRR
SOMEWHERE...
プルルル BRRR
I'M POSITIVE...
着信
七海 アオ
Incoming Call
Ao Nanami

POMF

どさっ...
THUD
HUFF
HUFF

... HUFF ...
I MADE IT...
へな。。。
SLUMP

KOTO-HAAA!
YOU ALL RIGHT?
ALL GOOD. HOW WERE THINGS UP TOP?
HIME AND ZAKURO... OH, THAT'S HER NOW.
BRRR
CAN YOU GET DOWN, HIME?
ZAKURO'S OUT OF COMMISSION, SO I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.
SHE SAID THIS PLACE IS THICK WITH DEATH...
FOOF
!
...HUH?
I FEEL BETTER NOW...
ZAKURO! ARE YOU OKAY?!

HMPH.
ばりっ
CRUNCH
YOU'VE GOT A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE TRYING TO TREAT ME.
?
ZAKURO, CAN YOU BRING ME UP THERE BEFORE YOU GUYS COME DOWN?
OKAAAY.
I'LL GO, TOO.
...ME THREE.
DON'T PUSH YOURSELF, AO.
NO... I'M GOING.
I WANT TO SEE FOR MYSELF.
ALL RIGHT.
TELL US IF IT GETS ROUGH.
AKINA!
HERE. FROM YAE-SAN.
SHE TOLD ME TO GIVE IT TO YOU WHEN YOU CAME.

ゴウン
GWON
ゴウン
GWON
ゴウン
GWON
ゴウン
GWON
ゴウン
GWON
ゴウン
GWON
KA-THUNK
ガタン。。。

AKI-NA... THAT KIMONO...
THEY'RE GRAMPS' FORMAL ROBES.
APPARENTLY YAE-SAN WAS HANGING ONTO THEM.
I SEE...
SKF
THIS IS IT, BUT...
THIS IS...YOU KNOW WHAT, RIGHT?
...

M' KAY.
ぐ、 STRETCH
I'LL OPEN IT.
HUH ?!
TWITCH びく
びく TWITCH
ばさッ FLAP
AAH!
DON'T FORCE YOURSELVES TO LOOK.
WE'LL DO IT.
...
!
ひょこ PEEK
ひょこ PEEK
ひょこ PEEK
HIME...
...I'LL LOOK.
I HAVE TO.

I'M THE MAYOR.
...ALL RIGHT
READY?
YEAH.
CLUNK
ガタッ。。。
...

...THIS IS MORE THAN I COULD'VE IMAGINED.
GIVEN HOW LONG IT'S BEEN, I WAS READY FOR SOMETHING... HARDER TO LOOK AT, BUT...
YEAH... IT'S IN PERFECT CONDITION. IT'S ALMOST AS IF HE'S SLEEPING.
I'M KINDA RELIEVED.
...
ふぅ
PHEW
ALL RIGHT.
WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO?
IT'S SLIPPING.

THE CORPSE THAT ACTS AS A POWER SOURCE FOR THE TOWER ITSELF IS SLIPPING.
THAT'S PROBABLY WHY THIS PILLAR SPLIT.
SO, I'M GOING TO FIX THE SLIPPAGE WITH TUNING.
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SEND HIM?
す、
SWIF
WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'LL HAPPEN IF I DO THAT.
THIS IS A STOP-GAP.
ALL RIGHT!
WAIT!

SWIF
す ...
GOOD CALL.
すっ
SWIF
...OKAY, THEN.
PULL

EVEN THOUGH IT'S SUMMER...
...IT'S SO COLD.
I CAN'T THINK OF ANY WAY TO DESCRIBE IT.
IT'S NOT LIKE I'VE BEEN SLACKING OFF ALL THIS TIME...
バチッ
BZZAT
...BUT NOW, FACING FORWARD, I HAVE TO FIRE MYSELF UP AGAIN.
I'LL TAKE BACK NII-SAN.
I'LL TRAIN MY KOTODAMA SO I CAN PAY EVERYONE BACK.

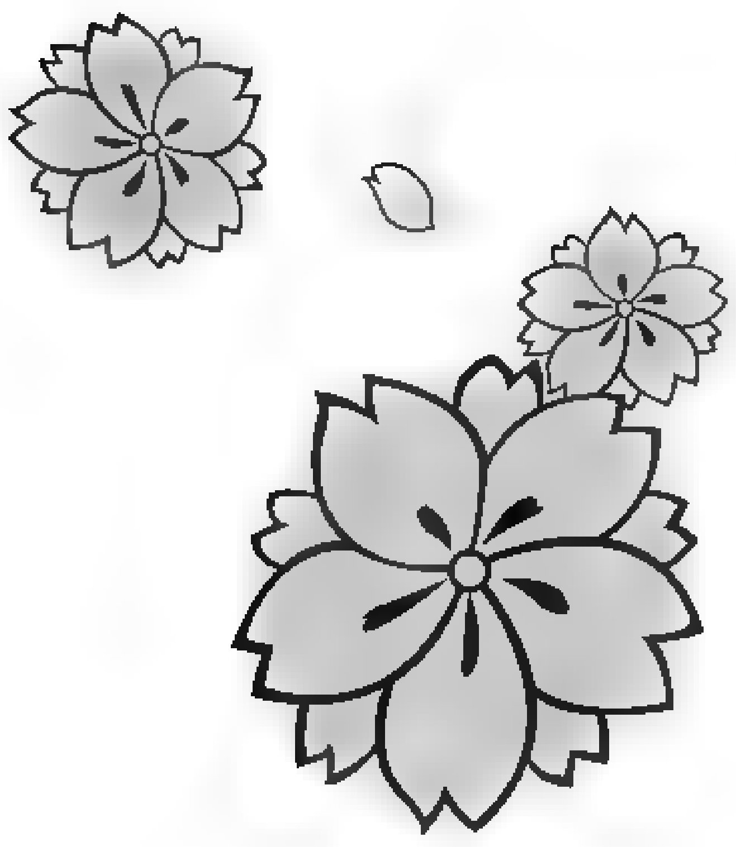
I'LL PROTECT THIS TOWN... AND EVERYONE IN IT.
LEAVE EVERYTHING TO ME.
I— WE...
...WILL SAVE THE WORLD!

ゴ ゴ ゴ ゴ ゴ
GRRRR
SO, THEY'VE FOUND THEIR RESOLVE.
I LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING WHAT FORM IT WILL TAKE.
ゴ
GRR
ゴ
HOW LETHARGIC... YOU'RE ALL TOO SOFT.
EVERYONE IN TOWN, YOU...
EVEN GRANDFATHER.
THE REPRESENTATIVE ISN'T SOFT. HE'S JUST GOTTEN SOFTER.
MAYBE THIS TOWN MOVED HIM IN SOME WAY.
ゴ ゴ
GRRR
ゴ ゴ
I CAN'T FATHOM IT.
ズズン...
SHOOM
ピタ
FREEZE
I CAN'T BEAR TO WATCH THINGS MOVE AT A SNAIL'S PACE.
NOW THAT I'VE OBTAINED POWER AND STATUS,
I'M GOING...

...TO KNOCK THIS WORLD ON ITS ASS.
BAM
AND THEN ...
...I'LL ACCELERATE IT.

67TH NIGHT STORY (PART FIVE) END

YOZAKURA QUARTET
12



YOZAKURA QUARTET 12

DAY HASN'T EVEN BROKEN...
...YET YOU SURE ARE IN A HURRY TO INVESTIGATE.
WELL, I CAME BACK FROM HAKONE TO FIND ONE OF THE PILLARS SPLIT IN HALF, AFTER ALL.
OF COURSE I'D THINK YOU'RE UP TO NO GOOD.
I'M TOUCHED, REALLY.
TO THINK YOU CARE ABOUT ME THAT MUCH.
I KNOW YOU GET LONELY EASILY.
YOU'RE JUST DYING FOR ATTENTION, AREN'T YOU?

CLANG
EVE-NING.
MHM.

NOT GOING TO JOIN THEM?
キン キン
KINK KINK
GIMME A BREAK.
SMOKE?
I'M GOOD.
THAT'S RIGHT. YOU QUIT, HUH?
WELL, YOU KNOW...
...WHAT'S THAT?
CHOCOLATE.
IT WORKS PRETTY WELL, ACTUALLY. CARE FOR ONE?
MAYBE LATER.
YOU CAME TO CHECK THE PILLAR, RIGHT? DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THOSE TWO'LL BE DONE ANYTIME SOON.
ガキッ
CLANG
I'M IN NO RUSH.
SHIINA-KUN'S HANDLING THE REAL INSPECTION TOMORROW.
SHIINA, EH?
SHE'S A TALENTED GIRL.
I'D LIKE HER FOR MY OWN DEPARTMENT.
YOU CAN'T HAVE HER.
THERE WAS A BIG REORGANIZATION OF SENATE STAFF THE OTHER DAY.
I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW BUSY WE'VE BEEN.
REORGANIZATION? THAT'S RARE.
MMM-HMM.

A NEW DEPARTMENT WAS FORMED.
THE DEMON AFFAIRS TACTICAL EXECUTION BUREAU.
THE VANGUARD OF ANTI-DEMON OPERATIONS UNDER THE DIRECT ORDER OF THE REPRESENTATIVE. IT'S A DEPARTMENT MADE OF STRAIGHT SHOOTERS.
...I GET YA.
THEN THAT MEANS THE ONE IN CHARGE MUST BE...
YOU GUESSED IT.
THE REPRESENTATIVE'S CHERISHED ONLY GRANDSON.
MURASAKI IYO.
I'LL BE DAMNED. HE'S ALREADY THAT AGE, HUH?
I'M GETTIN' OLD.
HE'S FAR TOO YOUNG TO BE A DIRECTOR, THOUGH.
I KNOW I CALLED SHIINA TALENTED, BUT HE'S ON A WHOLE OTHER LEVEL. THE KID'S A GENUINE THOROUGHBRED.
HE'S FIT FOR THE JOB, RIGHT?
YES.

I TRAINED HIM MYSELF, AFTER ALL.
...WELL, THAT'S JUST DANDY.
BUT, Y'KNOW, HOW SHOULD I PUT IT?
THAT KID, MURASAKI...
WHAT'S REALLY SCARY IS HOW MUCH HE IDOLIZES THE REPRESENTATIVE'S IDEOLOGY.
NOT TO MENTION...
BACK WHEN THE REPRESENTATIVE WAS AT HIS MOST HEADSTRONG.
YOU'RE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.
CRUMPLE
I CAN ASSURE YOU, OUT OF ALL THE SENATE'S DEPARTMENTS,
HIS WILL BECOME THE STRONGEST...
...AS WELL AS...
...THE MOST ZEALOUS BY FAR.

...
プハー
PFFF
LIKE I CARE.
WE ONLY FOLLOW THE CHIEF'S ORDERS.
WELL, I'LL PASS ALONG THE WORD.
THANK YOU.
YOU KNOW...
...WE DO WISH TO BE ON GOOD TERMS WITH THE POLICE.
...
THEN TRY GETTIN' ALONG WITH THE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION.
THE FOLKS AT AKINA'S OFFICE, TOO.
WONDER IF THEY'RE ABOUT DONE YET.
...HUH?
ZA
ZA
ZA

ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
ZA
...AIN'T THAT *ONMYODO*?
ZA
ZA
ZA
...SO IT WOULD SEEM.
DON'T GIMME THAT.
THAT'S YOUR GUYS' TRUMP CARD, RIGHT? EVER HEARD OF CONFIDENTIALITY?
SNAP
DON'T WORRY.
HE'S ONLY UTILIZING SURFACE-LEVEL THEORY.
ONMYODO... GOES DEEPER,
THICKER,
AND MUCH HEAVIER.
I SURE HOPE SO.
THE SATORI'S POWER,
THE HIZUMI'S POWER...
AND *ONMYODO* TO TOP IT OFF.
HE'S TURNED INTO A JACK OF ALL TRADES.

す
SLIP
THAAAT'S ENOUGH.
チン
CHINK
LET'S CALL IT A NIGHT.
チン
CHINK
AGREED.
THIS ISN'T GOING ANYWHERE SINCE I'M NOT *ALLOWED* TO DEFEAT YOU.
AS A GOD, I CAN'T DIRECTLY INTERFERE, AFTER ALL.
SOUNDS LIKE BLUFFING TO ME.
WELL? WHAT DO YOU THINK OF MY *ONMYODO*-AUGMENTED POWER?
NOT BAD, I GUESS.
BETTER THAN BEFORE, ANYWAY.
しゅ
WHISH
WHIF
WORKING AS A GOD, YOU START TO GO NUMB IN ALL SORTS OF WAYS.
SO, OCCASIONALLY I WANT SOME REASSURANCE THAT I REALLY DO EXIST IN THIS WORLD.
す
SWIF

IF IT MEANS A LITTLE STIMULATION NOW AND THEN, THEN I DON'T MIND...
...GETTING ATTACKED ON PURPOSE.
どん、
THNK
ZRRR
ず
ず
ず
ず
THAT'S ALL IT IS.
ぴっ
SNAP
...
とん、
SHNK
THAT'S GOOD TO HEAR.
WELL, IT WASN'T BAD FOR ME, EITHER.
ぎち、
CHIKA
IF YOUR BODY STARTS TO ACHE AGAIN, GIVE ME A CALL.
I MIGHT PAY YOU A VISIT IF I FEEL LIKE IT.

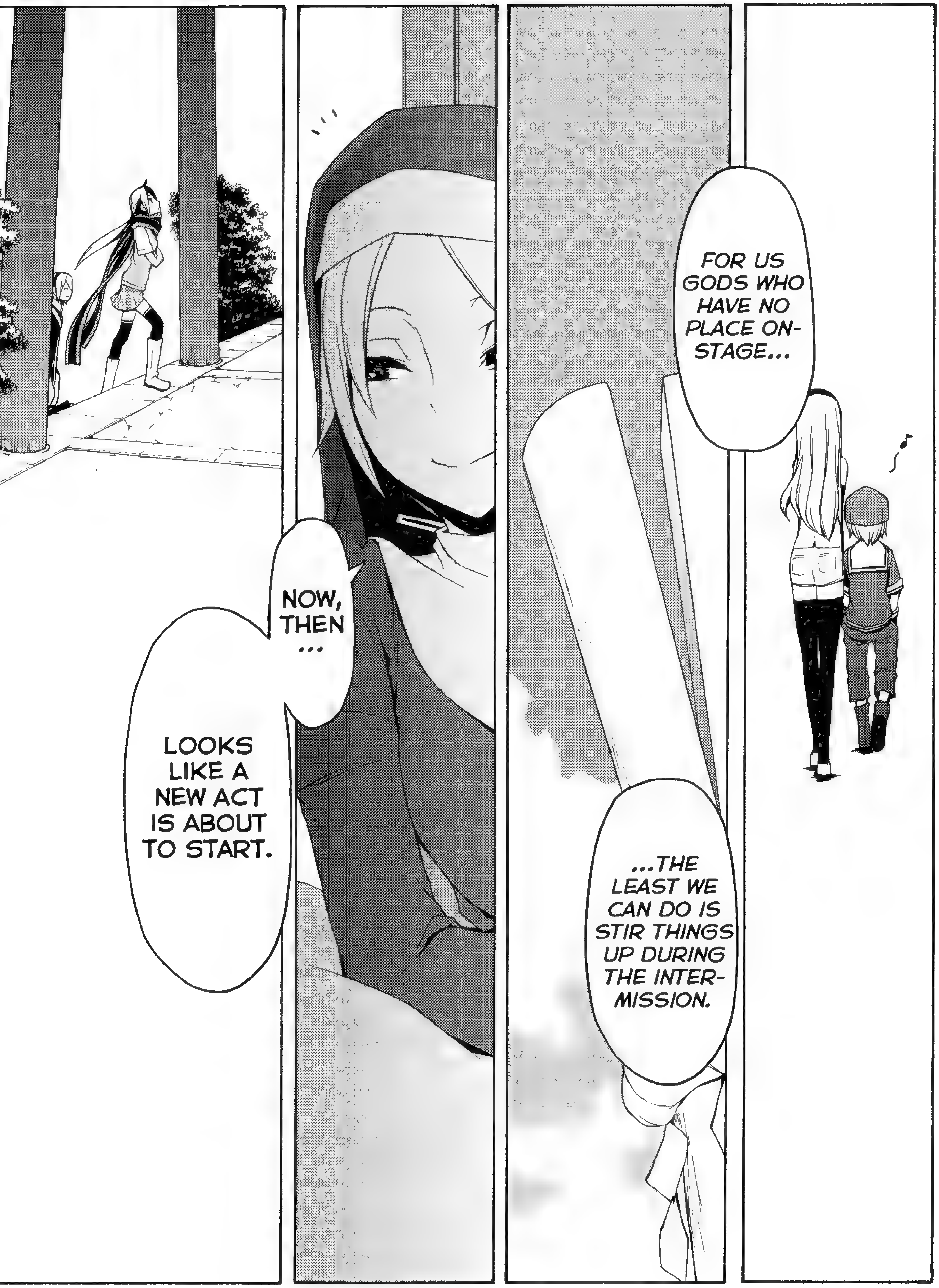
NO, THANK YOU.
IF YOU DON'T HAVE ANY BUSINESS...
NO, EVEN IF YOU DO, PLEASE DON'T COME.
カパっ
KA-THUNK

THIS MIGHT BE...
...A LITTLE TOO GRIM FOR THOSE KIDS.
FWISH
シュパッ
WELL, LET'S JUST...
...CALL IT FUNERAL MAKEUP.
シュウ
ウ
ウウ...
FSHHH
NOW JUST...
...TO DIG THOSE OUT OF THE CHURCH, I GUESS.
修復 Repair
HERE YOU GO.
ちょん
CLACK

YAAAY! THANKS SO MUCH.
IT'S NO BIGGIE.
SHE WAS PACING AROUND, AFTER ALL...
WHAT'S THAT ON YOUR HEAD?
OH, RIGHT!
GIVE THIS TO AKINA-KUN, WILL YOU?
HE SHOULD COME BY LATER.
ROGER.
TING
チリン…
PHEW...
AS FAR AS HELP GOES, THIS IS ABOUT ALL I CAN DO.
IT'S NOT...
...ANY BUSINESS OF MINE, AS A GOD.

AFTER ALL...
...THIS IS YOUR GUYS' STORY.

A STORY FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU...
...FULL OF TEARS, LAUGHTER, AND LIFE.


FOR US GODS WHO HAVE NO PLACE ON-STAGE...
...THE LEAST WE CAN DO IS STIR THINGS UP DURING THE INTERMISSION.
NOW, THEN...
LOOKS LIKE A NEW ACT IS ABOUT TO START.

WELL, UNTIL I HAVE A PART TO PLAY AGAIN...
...I BID YOU ALL...

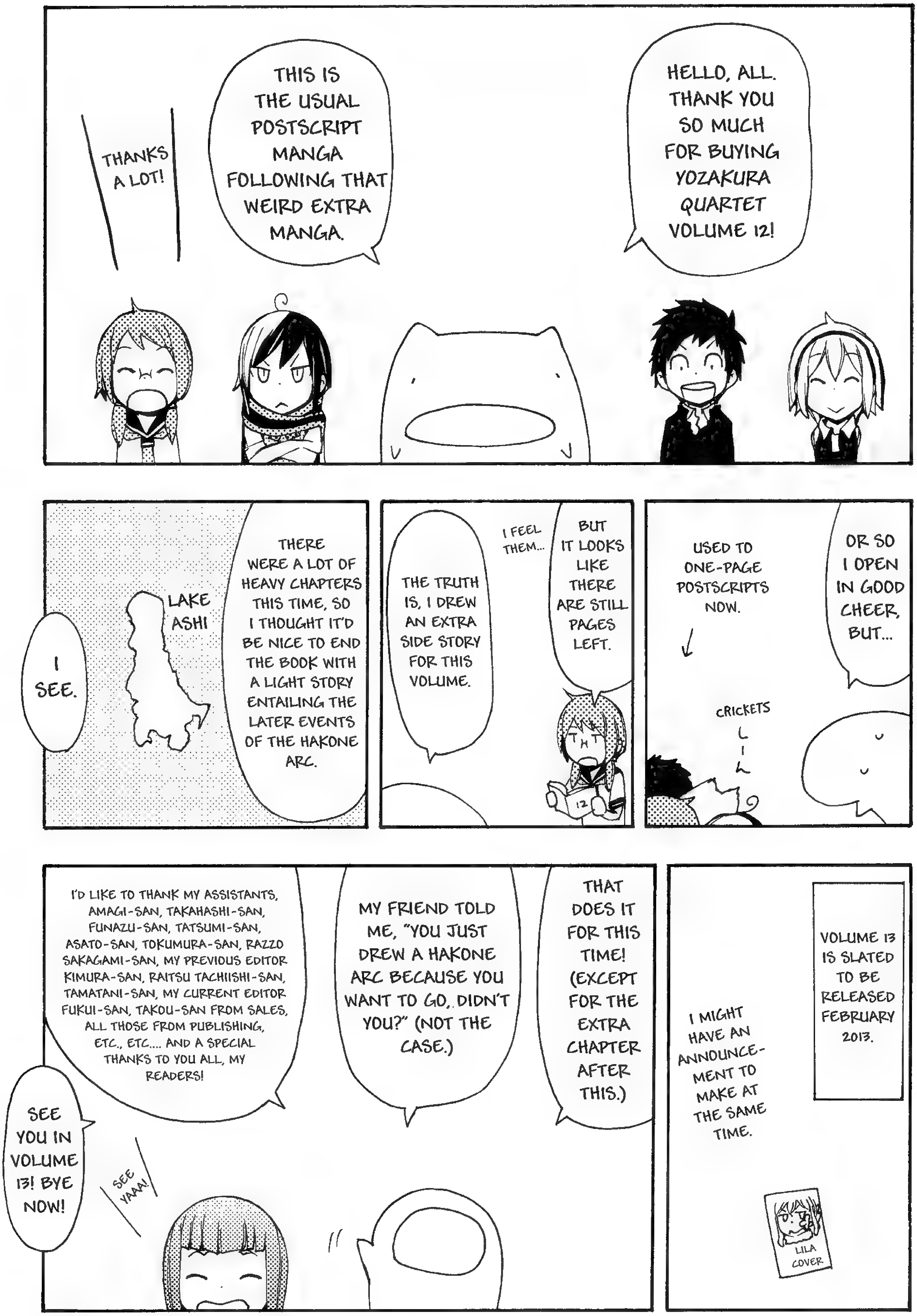
#68TH STORY (EPILOGUE) END

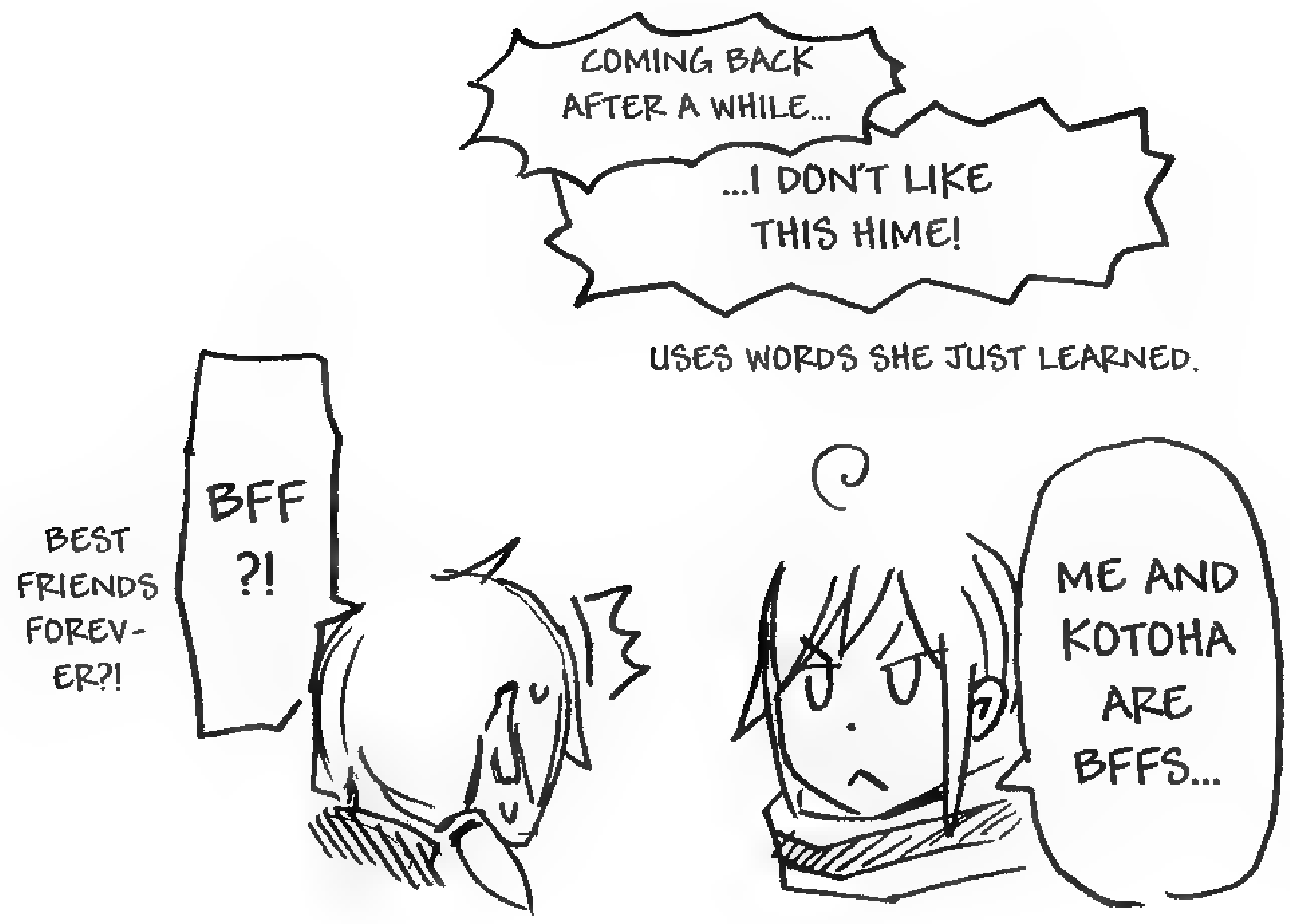
To be Continued .....

YOZAKURA QUARTET 13

よざカル!
YOZAQUART!
ふっ
POOF
THE LIGHTS WENT OUT!
MMM... IT MIGHT'VE BEEN BECAUSE I USED THE MICROWAVE TO MAKE SOME SNACKS TO GO WITH MY BOOZE.
WHEE! HIC.
THAT'S ALL?!
JUST HOW RUNDOWN IS THIS APARTMENT?
LET'S SEE. BREAKER... BREAKER...
HM?
ぐに
MOOSH
THIS SOFTNESS. COULD IT BE...?
NO, BUT THAT'S TOO NORMAL. THERE HAS TO BE MORE TO THIS...
ホニ
GROPE
ホニ
GROPE
ぱっ
FLICK
NO TWIST WHATSOEVER!
OH, MY. WHAT'S ALL THIS, THEN?
ホニ
GROPE
ALRIGHTY, THAT DOES IT FOR A GAG!
YOU WERE BEHIND THIS?!
BREAKER
o0

POSTSCRIPT MANGA


HELLO, ALL. THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR BUYING YOZAKURA QUARTET VOLUME 12!
THIS IS THE USUAL POSTSCRIPT MANGA FOLLOWING THAT WEIRD EXTRA MANGA.
THANKS A LOT!
OR SO I OPEN IN GOOD CHEER, BUT...
USED TO ONE-PAGE POSTSCRIPTS NOW.
CRICKETS
BUT IT LOOKS LIKE THERE ARE STILL PAGES LEFT.
I FEEL THEM...
THE TRUTH IS, I DREW AN EXTRA SIDE STORY FOR THIS VOLUME.
12
THERE WERE A LOT OF HEAVY CHAPTERS THIS TIME, SO I THOUGHT IT'D BE NICE TO END THE BOOK WITH A LIGHT STORY ENTAILING THE LATER EVENTS OF THE HAKONE ARC.
LAKE ASHI
I SEE.
VOLUME 13 IS SLATED TO BE RELEASED FEBRUARY 2013.
I MIGHT HAVE AN ANNOUNCEMENT TO MAKE AT THE SAME TIME.
LILA COVER
THAT DOES IT FOR THIS TIME! (EXCEPT FOR THE EXTRA CHAPTER AFTER THIS.)
MY FRIEND TOLD ME, "YOU JUST DREW A HAKONE ARC BECAUSE YOU WANT TO GO, DIDN'T YOU?" (NOT THE CASE.)
I'D LIKE TO THANK MY ASSISTANTS, AMAGI-SAN, TAKAHASHI-SAN, FUNAZU-SAN, TATSUMI-SAN, ASATO-SAN, TOKUMURA-SAN, RAZZO SAKAGAMI-SAN, MY PREVIOUS EDITOR KIMURA-SAN, RAITSU TACHIISHI-SAN, TAMATANI-SAN, MY CURRENT EDITOR FUKUI-SAN, TAKOU-SAN FROM SALES, ALL THOSE FROM PUBLISHING, ETC., ETC.... AND A SPECIAL THANKS TO YOU ALL, MY READERS!
SEE YOU IN VOLUME 13! BYE NOW!
SEE YAAA!


COMING BACK AFTER A WHILE...
...I DON'T LIKE THIS HIME!
USES WORDS SHE JUST LEARNED.
ME AND KOTOHA ARE BFFS...
BFF?!
BEST FRIENDS FOREV-ER?!

MORNIIING! WHAT A WASTE TO SLEEP A VACATION AWAY!
ばごーん
BAM
COME ON NOW, UP–
AM 5:00
...OH!
YAE'S THE ONLY ONE HERE.
Z Z Z
WHERE COULD EVERYONE HAVE GONE?
かぽーん
KA-CLUNK
#57+ THE MOUNTAIN PASS TOWN
KOTOHA
AAH... A DIP IN THE HOT SPRINGS AT DAYBREAK IS THE BEST.
IT REALLY IS.

は～ AAH
は～ AAH
HIME AND AO ARE OVER THERE MELTING.
ALL RIGHT, TOUKA. I'LL WASH YOUR BODY FOR YOU.
ギクッ TWITCH
GEH! WHY?! I'M FINE.
WELL, I CAN'T WASH HIME OR AO SINCE THEY'RE LIKE THAT.
C'MON, DON'T BE SHY.
HEY...! KOTOHA-CHAN! I CAN WASH MYSELF!
ごし SCRUB
ごし SCRUB
わはははは WA HA HA HA HA
ぎょえー GWAAAH!
とろーん DAZY
LOOK, GUYS. DAY IS BREAKING.
THE SUN'S RISING.
...
OOOH!

WOW! HOW PRETTY.
SPLENDID. JUST SUPERB.
THIS IS THE TRUE CHARM OF AN OPEN-AIR BATH.
THIS HAS BEEN A FUN TRIP, HUH, HIME-CHAN?
じーん STARE
...
MAY THIS YEAR BE EVER PEACEFUL...
HIME-CHAN! IT'S NOT THE FIRST SUNRISE OF THE YEAR!
は～ AAH

HM HM HMM.
ぐつぐつ
BLUB BLUB
IT MAKES IT WORTH COOKING FOR A GROUP WITH SUCH BIG APPETITES.
COOKED TO PERFECTION!
GOOD MORNING.
OH! AKINA, KYOSUKE!
COULDN'T WAIT FOR BREAKFAST, COULD YOU?
ER, NOT EXACTLY. DO YOU HAVE A MINUTE?
DANGLE ブラ
ブラ DANGLE
WE HAVE A FAVOR TO ASK...
HMM?

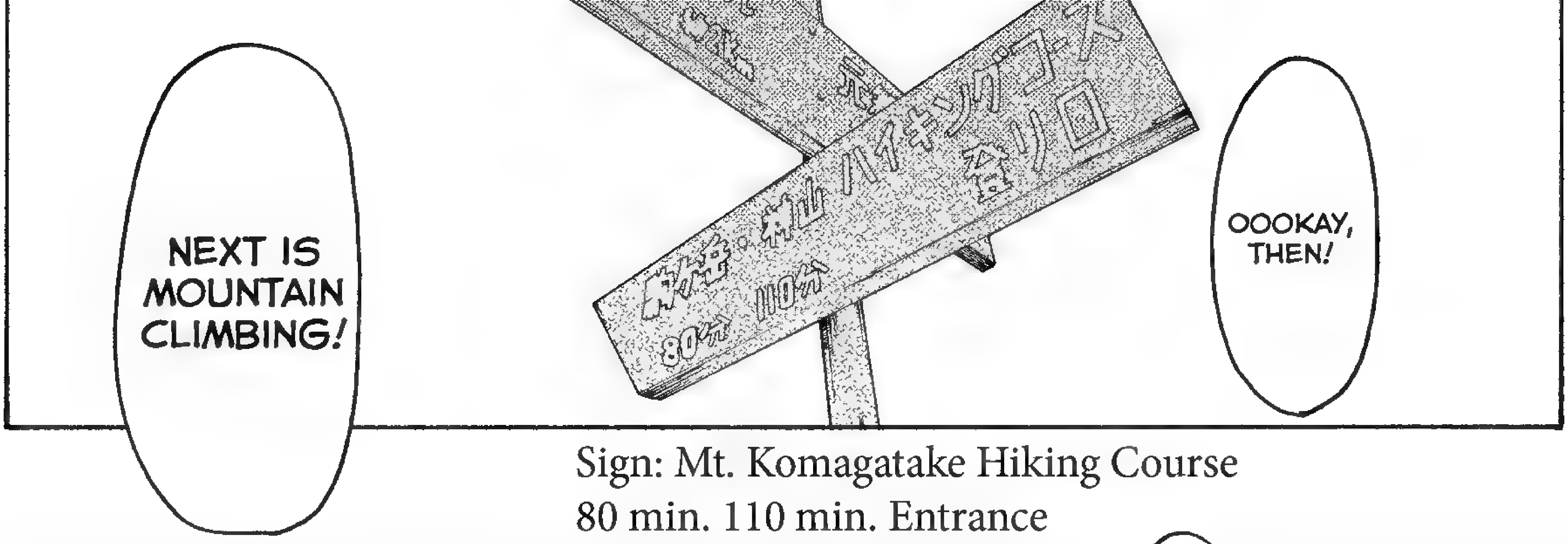
THAT WAS A LOVELY BREAKFAST.
THANKS FOR EVERYTHING!
OH HO HO.
WELL, THEN. SHALL WE?
YOU'RE COMING, TOO, TOMOE-SAN? IS IT OKAY TO LEAVE THE INN UNATTENDED?
THERE AREN'T ANY GUESTS COMING ANYTIME SOON...
...SO I THOUGHT I'D SHOW YOU AROUND HAKONE.
I SEE...
LET'S LOOK AROUND WHILE IT'S NICE OUT.
ALL RIGHT, FIRST UP...

WH-WH-WHAT?! A TORII* ON A LAKE?!
WHAT'S THIS DOING HERE?!
すてき
AWESOME!
DOOM
...THERE'S A HUGE STAIRWAY EXTENDING FROM THE LAKE!

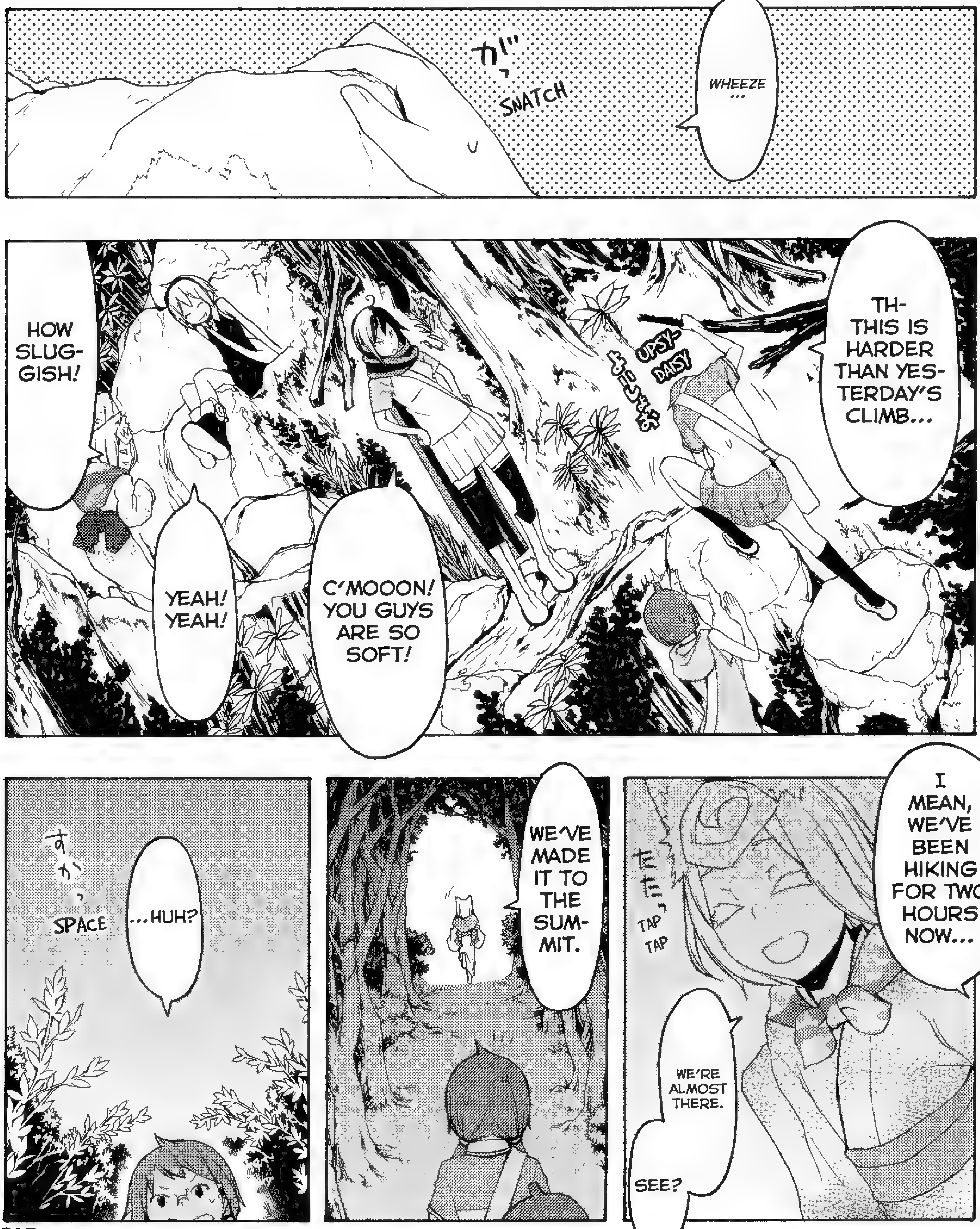
*A Shinto shrine archway.

ばーーん
LAKE ASHI IS HUGE!
BOOM
AND BEHIND US...
ばーん
BA
COOOOL! WHAT IS THIS ARCHITECTURE?!

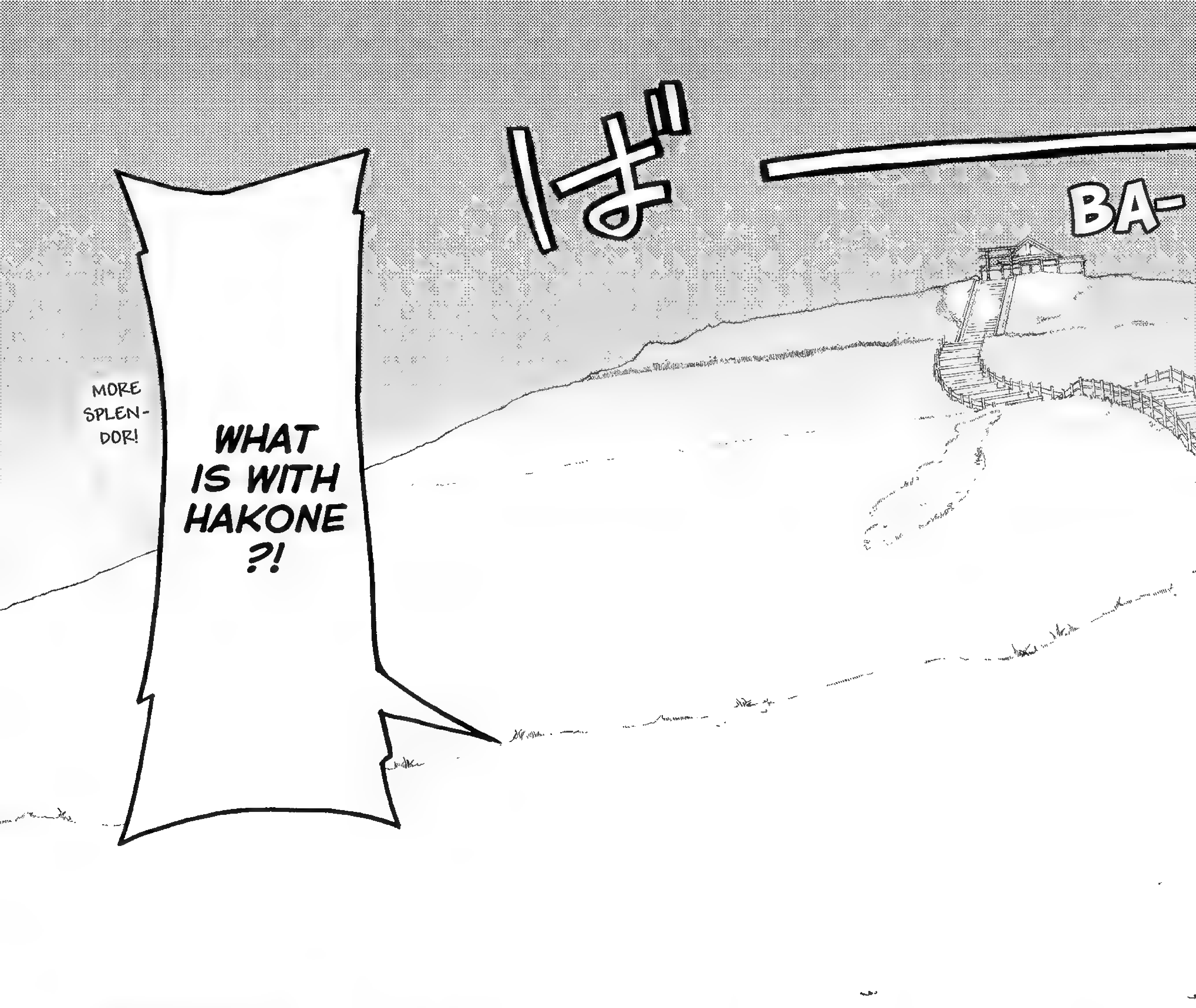
AND THE SHRINE UP TOP IS NICE, TOO.
THIS IS HAKONE'S HIDDEN POTENTIAL...
HAKONE'S SPLENDOR...
INDEED. ISN'T HAKONE SHRINE LOVELY?
THIS SHRINE IS CREDITED TO PRIEST MANGAN, WHO IN THE YEAR 757...
HMM...
NOT LISTENING.
I DON'T THINK I CAN COPY THIS WITH *KOTODAMA*.
IT'S TOO COMPLEX...
HARD TO BELIEVE WE'RE VISITING A SHRINE WITH TWO GODS...
PHEW, IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
RATTLE RATTLE
ガラガラ
MAY EVERYONE LIVE HEALTHILY AND HAPPILY!
LIKEWISE!
WHERE TO NEXT?
HOW STRONG ARE EVERYONE'S LEGS?
AVERAGE, I GUESS...?

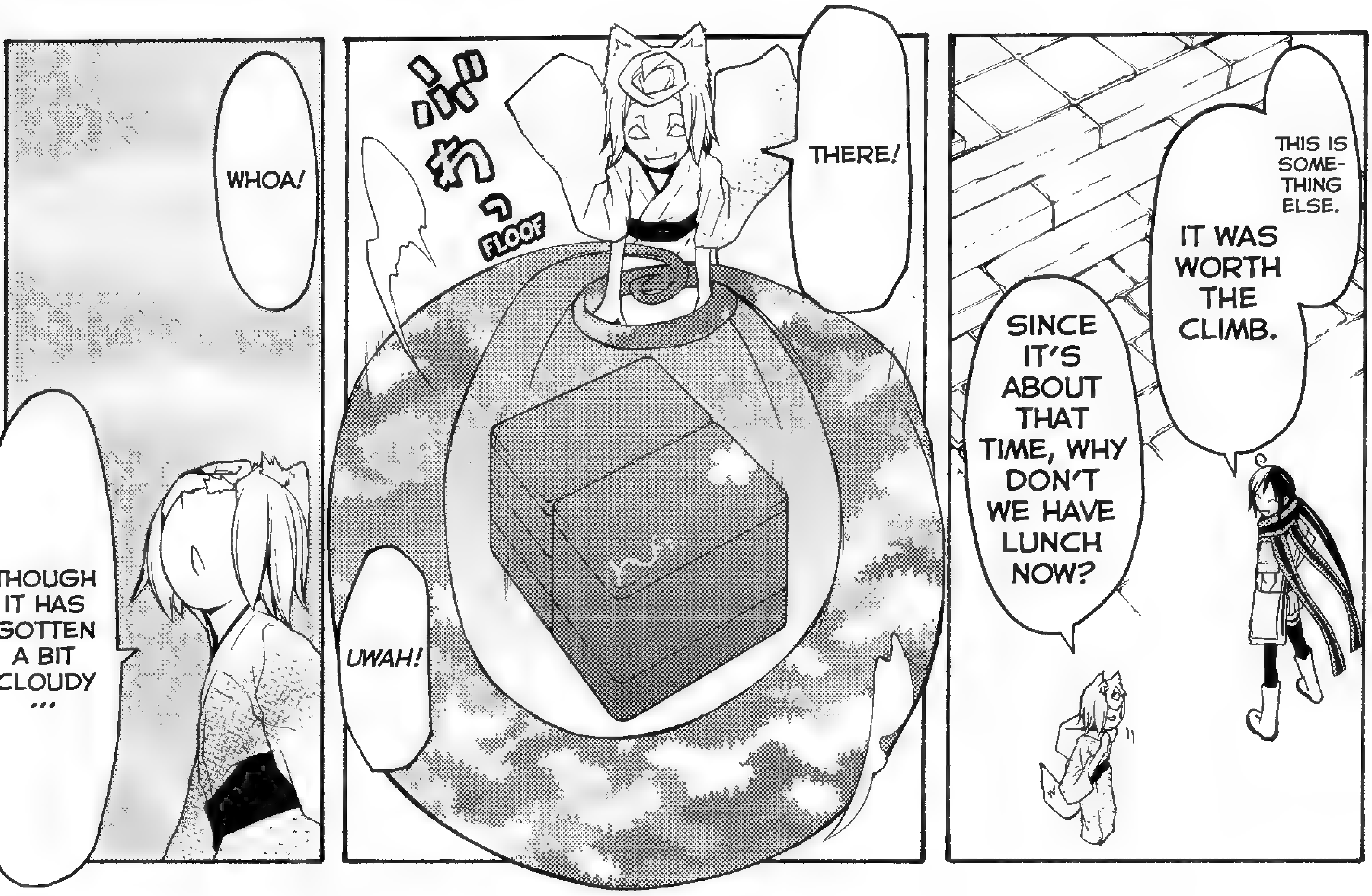

OOOKAY, THEN!
NEXT IS MOUNTAIN CLIMBING!
ハイキングコース
登り口
80分
110分

Sign: Mt. Komagatake Hiking Course
80 min. 110 min. Entrance


WHEEZE…
ガッ
SNATCH
TH- THIS IS HARDER THAN YESTERDAY'S CLIMB…
よっこらせ
UPSY-DAISY
C'MOOON! YOU GUYS ARE SO SOFT!
YEAH! YEAH!
HOW SLUGGISH!
I MEAN, WE'VE BEEN HIKING FOR TWO HOURS NOW…
たた
TAP TAP
WE'RE ALMOST THERE.
SEE?
WE'VE MADE IT TO THE SUMMIT.
すかっ
SPACE
…HUH?

DWA AAH!
SUDDENLY THERE ARE NO TREES AND A HUGE MEADOW!
DOOM
ーん
MAN...I UNDERESTIMATED HAKONE. I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST A CHILL HOT SPRINGS TOWN.
AT THE TOP IS HAKONE SHRINE'S REAR BUILDING.
THE ORIGINAL SHRINE.


ばー
BA-
WHAT IS WITH HAKONE ?!
MORE SPLEN-DOR!


THIS IS SOMETHING ELSE.
IT WAS WORTH THE CLIMB.
SINCE IT'S ABOUT THAT TIME, WHY DON'T WE HAVE LUNCH NOW?
THERE!
ぶわっ
FLOOF
UWAH!
WHOA!
THOUGH IT HAS GOTTEN A BIT CLOUDY…

THIS IS A SPECIAL OCCASION.
HWOOP!
HWOOP
ANYTHING GOES FOR GODS!
MEEE みーん
MEE みん
MEE みん
CAN YOU DO THAT, TOO, YAE-SAN?
I CAN.
I JUST DON'T BECAUSE IT'S TIRING.
LUNCH SHOULD TASTE EVEN BETTER AFTER EXERCISE.
I WONDER WHAT'S ON THE MENU...
RUSTLE ごそ
RUSTLE ごそ
HAND にゅっ
?
ONE, TWO...

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HIME!
ぽ
POP
ぽ
POP
ぽ
POP
ぽ
POP
ん〜
HUH? BIRTHDAY? MINE WAS LAST MONTH…
YOU ALL GAVE ME PRESENTS, REMEMBER?
IS THIS VERY WORLD AN ILLUSION?
WE GAVE YOU GIFTS, BUT WE NEVER THREW A PARTY, RIGHT?
THE ZAKURO FIASCO HAPPENED AROUND THAT TIME.
THEN THE LILA FIASCO RIGHT AFTER.
ONE-PIECE PARTY POPPERS.
OH, YEAH.
I SEE…

YEAH.
THANKS, GUYS.
CON-GRATS!
HERE, TRY THE CAKE!
CHOP-STICKS?
? ?
ずるっ
SLIP

CAKE?! HUH?! WHAT IS THIS?!
ビクッ TWITCH
← SOBA
GRATED YAM →
WE HAD TOMOE-SAN TEACH US HOW TO MAKE SOBA.
WE ARRANGED IT WITH GRATED YAM HARVESTED IN HAKONE.
ENJOY!
THE VISUAL IMPACT IS INSANE...
HERE, TRY IT WITH MY SPECIAL DIPPING SAUCE.
ずる SLURP
ずる SLURP
ず SIP
HOW IS IT, HIME?
...
ずる SLURP
ずる SLURP
ずる SLURP
DELICIOUS, OF COURSE. HOW COULD IT NOT BE?
IT'S THE BEST I'VE EVER HAD.
GLAD TO HEAR IT.
ALL RIGHT, LET'S DIG IN, TOO.
YAAAY! SOBAAA!

WELL, NOW THAT WE'VE CLEANED UP...
...I SUGGEST YOU ALL TAKE THE ROPEWAY DOWN.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, TOMOE-SAN?
I'LL WALK.
THE INN IS CLOSER FROM HERE.
WELL, THEN. TAKE CARE...
TOMOE-SAN!
...
UMM.
ABOUT COMING AGAIN NEXT YEAR...

ぎゅ
HUG
YOU'RE BUSY, RIGHT?
I WON'T PRESSURE YOU TO COME NEXT YEAR.
I'LL JUST BE HAPPY IF YOU COME AGAIN SOMETIME...
ヒュー
ヒュー
WHEE-
WHEW
ガラ
ガラ…
SLIDE
SLIDE
PHEW.

CRUNCH
パリ。。。
...I HAVE TO CLEAN THE BATHS.
しゅっ
SCRUB
しゅっ
SCRUB

しゃー SCRUB
しゃー SCRUB
しゃー SCRUB
しゃー SCRUB
...
THE MOON IS LOVELY TONIGHT.
I SHOULD TAKE A DIP WHILE I'M AT IT.
かぽーん KA-CLUNK
...

AS USUAL...
...IT GETS LONELY AFTER GUESTS LEAVE.
ほろり…
TEARY
I'VE LIVED FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS, YET I CAN NEVER GET USED TO THIS.
しゅん…
MOPE
ぺたん
PLAP
ピロロロロン
BRING DING
HMM?
ポニョ
BOOP

Sender: Hime Yarizakura

Subject: I asked Yae-san for your number.

Gods all seem to have phones these days, huh? I'll be sure to send you lots of tasty things from the area again.

ピロリーン JINGLE
TOUKA HERE! THANKS FOR EVERYTHING!
OH!
ピロリーン JINGLE
AO HERE!
THIS IS KOTOHA. THANKS A LOT!
OH!
ピロリーン JINGLE
AKINA HERE. I'LL WORK ON MY SOBA PULLING.
ピロリーン JINGLE
OH, MY!
...KYOSUKE.
ピ BEEP
Kyosuke here. I said next year, but if I can set aside some time, I'd like to visit again within the year. I'm sure Hakone is lovely in the fall.
WHAT A CUTIE.
キュンキュン THROB THROB
PAYBACK.
MAKE IT YOUR WALLPAPER.
ピロリーン☆ JINGLE
GYAAAH!
?
THE END

Yozakura Quartet 12

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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